


**DESIRE UNDER
THE ELMS**

Eugene O'Neill



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A Play in Three Parts

by

Eugene O'Neill

(1888-1953)

Revised Second Edition, as published by Boni & Liveright, 1925

Characters

EPHRAIM CABOT

SIMEON

PETER--*his sons*

EBEN

ABBIE PUTNAM

Young Girl, Two Farmers, The Fiddler, A Sheriff, and other folk from the neighboring farms

The action of the entire play takes place in, and immediately outside of, the Cabot farmhouse in New England, in the year 1850. The south end of the house faces front to a stone wall with a wooden gate at center opening on a country road. The house is in good condition but in need of paint. Its walls are a sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded. Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles.

There is a path running from the gate around the right corner of the house to the front door. A narrow porch is on this side. The end wall facing us has two windows in its upper story, two larger ones on the

floor below. The two upper are those of the father's bedroom and that of the brothers. On the left, ground floor, is the kitchen--on the right, the parlor, the shades of which are always drawn down.

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Desire Under the Elms

PART I

SCENE ONE

Exterior of the Farmhouse. It is sunset of a day at the beginning of summer in the year 1850. There is no wind and everything is still. The sky above the roof is suffused with deep colors, the green of the elms glows, but the house is in shadow, seeming pale and washed out by contrast.

A door opens and Eben Cabot comes to the end of the porch and stands looking down the road to the right. He has a large bell in his hand and this he swings mechanically, awakening a deafening clangor. Then he puts his hands on his hips and stares up at the sky. He sighs with a puzzled awe and blurts out with halting appreciation.

EBEN--God! Purty! (His eyes fall and he stares about him frowningly. He is twenty-five, tall and sinewy. His face is well-formed, good-looking, but its expression is resentful and defensive. His defiant, dark eyes remind one of a wild animal's in captivity. Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued. There is a fierce repressed vitality about him. He has black hair, mustache, a thin curly trace of beard. He is dressed in rough farm clothes. He spits on the ground with intense disgust,

turns and goes back into the house. Simeon and Peter come in from their work in the fields. They are tall men, much older than their half-brother [Simeon is thirty-nine and Peter thirty-seven], built on a squarer, simpler model, fleshier in body, more bovine and homelier in face, shrewder and more practical. Their shoulders stoop a bit from years of farm work. They clump heavily along in their clumsy thick-soled boots caked with earth. Their clothes, their faces, hands, bare arms and throats are earth-stained. They smell of earth. They stand together for a moment in front of the house and, as if with the one impulse, stare dumbly up at the sky, leaning on their hoes. Their faces have a compressed, unresigned expression. As they look upward, this softens.)

SIMEON--(*grudgingly*) Purty.

PETER--Ay-eh.

SIMEON--(*suddenly*) Eighteen years ago.

PETER--What?

SIMEON--Jenn. My woman. She died.

PETER--I'd fergot.

SIMEON--I rec'lect--now an' agin. Makes it lonesome. She'd hair long's a hoss' tail--an' yaller like gold!

PETER--Waal--she's gone. (*this with indifferent finality--then after a pause*) They's gold in the West, Sim.

SIMEON--(*still under the influence of sunset--vaguely*) In the sky?

PETER--Waal--in a manner o' speakin'--thar's the promise. (*growing excited*) Gold in the sky--in the West--Golden Gate--Californi-a!--Goldest West!--fields o' gold!

SIMEON--(*excited in his turn*) Fortunes layin' just atop o' the ground waitin' t' be picked! Solomon's mines, they says! (*For a moment they continue looking up at the sky--then their eyes drop.*)

PETER--(*with sardonic bitterness*) Here--it's stones atop o' the ground--stones atop o' stones--makin' stone walls--year atop o' year--him 'n' yew 'n' me 'n' then Eben--makin' stone walls fur him to fence us in!

SIMEON--We've wuked. Give our strength. Give our years. Plowed 'em under in the ground--(*he stamps rebelliously*)--rottin'--makin' soil for his crops! (*a pause*) Waal--the farm pays good for hereabouts.

PETER--If we plowed in Californi-a, they'd be lumps o' gold in the furrow!

SIMEON--Californi-a's t'other side o' earth, a'most. We got t' calc'late--

PETER--(*after a pause*) 'Twould be hard fur me, too, to give up what we've 'arned here by our sweat. (*A pause. Eben sticks his head out of the dining-room window, listening.*)

SIMEON--Ay-eh. (*a pause*) Mebbe--he'll die soon.

PETER--(*doubtfully*) Mebbe.

SIMEON--Mebbe--fur all we knows--he's dead now.

PETER--Ye'd need proof.

SIMEON--He's been gone two months--with no word.

PETER--Left us in the fields an evenin' like this. Hitched up an' druv off into the West. That's plumb onnateral. He hain't never been off this farm 'ceptin' t' the village in thirty year or more, not since he

married Eben's maw. (*A pause. Shrewdly*) I calc'late we might git him declared crazy by the court.

SIMEON--He skinned 'em too slick. He got the best o' all on 'em. They'd never b'lieve him crazy. (*a pause*) We got t' wait--till he's under ground.

EBEN--(*with a sardonic chuckle*) Honor thy father! (*They turn, startled, and stare at him. He grins, then scowls.*) I pray he's died. (*They stare at him. He continues matter-of-factly.*) Supper's ready.

SIMEON AND PETER--(*together*) Ay-eh.

EBEN--(*gazing up at the sky*) Sun's downin' purty.

SIMEON AND PETER--(*pointing*) Ay-eh. They's gold in the West.

EBEN--(*pointing*) Ay-eh. Yonder atop o' the hill pasture, ye mean?

SIMEON AND PETER--(*together*) In Californi-a!

EBEN--Hunh? (*stares at them indifferently for a second, then draws*) Waal--supper's gittin' cold. (*He turns back into kitchen.*)

SIMEON--(*startled--smacks his lips*) I air hungry!

PETER--(*sniffing*) I smells bacon!

SIMEON--(*with hungry appreciation*) Bacon's good!

PETER--(*in same tone*) Bacon's bacon! (*They turn, shouldering each other, their bodies bumping and rubbing together as they hurry clumsily to their food, like two friendly oxen toward their evening meal. They disappear around the right corner of house and can be heard entering the door.*)

(*The Curtain Falls*)

SCENE TWO

The color fades from the sky. Twilight begins. The interior of the kitchen is now visible. A pine table is at center, a cook-stove in the right rear corner, four rough wooden chairs, a tallow candle on the table. In the middle of the rear wall is fastened a big advertizing poster with a ship in full sail and the word "California" in big letters. Kitchen utensils hang from nails. Everything is neat and in order but the atmosphere is of a men's camp kitchen rather than that of a home.

Places for three are laid. Eben takes boiled potatoes and bacon from the stove and puts them on the table, also a loaf of bread and a crock of water. Simeon and Peter shoulder in, slump down in their chairs without a word. Eben joins them. The three eat in silence for a moment, the two elder as naturally unrestrained as beasts of the field, Eben picking at his food without appetite, glancing at them with a tolerant dislike.

SIMEON--*(suddenly turns to Eben)* Looky here! Ye'd oughtn't t' said that, Eben.

PETER--'Twa'n't righteous.

EBEN--What?

SIMEON--Ye prayed he'd died.

EBEN--Waal--don't yew pray it? *(a pause)*

PETER--He's our Paw.

EBEN--(*violently*) Not mine!

SIMEON--(*dryly*) Ye'd not let no one else say that about yer Maw!
Ha! (*He gives one abrupt sardonic guffaw. Peter grins.*)

EBEN--(*very pale*) I meant--I hain't his'n--I hain't like him--he
hain't me!

PETER--(*dryly*) Wait till ye've growed his age!

EBEN--(*intensely*) I'm Maw--every drop o' blood! (*A pause. They
stare at him with indifferent curiosity.*)

PETER--(*reminiscently*) She was good t' Sim 'n' me. A good Step-
maw's scurse.

SIMEON--She was good t' everyone.

EBEN--(*greatly moved, gets to his feet and makes an awkward bow
to each of them--stammering*) I be thankful t' ye. I'm her--her heir.
(*He sits down in confusion.*)

PETER--(*after a pause--judicially*) She was good even t' him.

EBEN--(*fiercely*) An' fur thanks he killed her!

SIMEON--(*after a pause*) No one never kills nobody. It's allus
somethin'. That's the murderer.

EBEN--Didn't he slave Maw t' death?

PETER--He's slaved himself t' death. He's slaved Sim 'n' me 'n' yew
t' death--on'y none o' us hain't died--yit.

SIMEON--It's somethin'--drivin' him--t' drive us!

EBEN--(*vengefully*) Waal--I hold him t' jedgment! (*then scornfully*)
Somethin'! What's somethin'?

SIMEON--Dunno.

EBEN--(*sardonically*) What's drivin' yew to Californi-a, mebbe? (*They look at him in surprise.*) Oh, I've heerd ye! (*then, after a pause*) But ye'll never go t' the gold fields!

PETER--(*assertively*) Mebbe!

EBEN--Whar'll ye git the money?

PETER--We kin walk. It's an a'mighty ways--Californi-a--but if yew was t' put all the steps we've walked on this farm end t' end we'd be in the moon!

EBEN--The Injuns'll skulp ye on the plains.

SIMEON--(*with grim humor*) We'll mebbe make 'em pay a hair fur a hair!

EBEN--(*decisively*) But t'ain't that. Ye won't never go because ye'll wait here fur yer share o' the farm, thinkin' allus he'll die soon.

SIMEON--(*after a pause*) We've a right.

PETER--Two thirds belongs t' us.

EBEN--(*jumping to his feet*) Ye've no right! She wa'n't yewr Maw! It was her farm! Didn't he steal it from her? She's dead. It's my farm.

SIMEON--(*sardonically*) Tell that t' Paw--when he comes! I'll bet ye a dollar he'll laugh--fur once in his life. Ha! (*He laughs himself in one single mirthless bark.*)

PETER--(*amused in turn, echoes his brother*) Ha!

SIMEON--(*after a pause*) What've ye got held agin us, Eben? Year arter year it's skulked in yer eye--somethin'.

PETER--Ay-eh.

EBEN--Ay-eh. They's somethin'. (*suddenly exploding*) Why didn't ye never stand between him 'n' my Maw when he was slavin' her to her grave--t' pay her back fur the kindness she done t' yew? (*There is a long pause. They stare at him in surprise.*)

SIMEON--Waal--the stock'd got t' be watered.

PETER--'R they was woodin' t' do.

SIMEON--'R plowin'.

PETER--'R hayin'.

SIMEON--'R spreadin' manure.

PETER--'R weedin'.

SIMEON--'R prunin'.

PETER--'R milkin'.

EBEN--(*breaking in harshly*) An' makin' walls--stone atop o' stone--makin' walls till yer heart's a stone ye heft up out o' the way o' growth onto a stone wall t' wall in yer heart!

SIMEON--(*matter-of-factly*) We never had no time t' meddle.

PETER--(*to Eben*) Yew was fifteen afore yer Maw died--an' big fur yer age. Why didn't ye never do nothin'?

EBEN--(*harshly*) They was chores t' do, wa'n't they? (*a pause--then slowly*) It was on'y arter she died I come to think o' it. Me cookin'--doin' her work--that made me know her, suffer her sufferin'--she'd come back t' help--come back t' bile potatoes--come back t' fry bacon--come back t' bake biscuits--come back all cramped up t' shake the fire, an' carry ashes, her eyes weepin' an' bloody with

smoke an' cinders same's they used t' be. She still comes back--stands by the stove thar in the evenin'--she can't find it nateral sleepin' an' restin' in peace. She can't git used t' bein' free--even in her grave.

SIMEON--She never complained none.

EBEN--She'd got too tired. She'd got too used t' bein' too tired. That was what he done. (*with vengeful passion*) An' sooner'r later, I'll meddle. I'll say the thin's I didn't say then t' him! I'll yell 'em at the top o' my lungs. I'll see t' it my Maw gits some rest an' sleep in her grave! (*He sits down again, relapsing into a brooding silence. They look at him with a queer indifferent curiosity.*)

PETER--(*after a pause*) Whar in tarnation d'ye s'pose he went, Sim?

SIMEON--Dunno. He druv off in the buggy, all spick an' span, with the mare all breshed an' shiny, druv off clackin' his tongue an' wavin' his whip. I remember it right well. I was finishin' plowin', it was spring an' May an' sunset, an' gold in the West, an' he druv off into it. I yells "Whar ye goin', Paw?" an' he hauls up by the stone wall a jiffy. His old snake's eyes was glitterin' in the sun like he'd been drinkin' a jugful an' he says with a mule's grin: "Don't ye run away till I come back!"

PETER--Wonder if he knowed we was wantin' fur Cali-forni-a?

SIMEON--Mebbe. I didn't say nothin' and he says, lookin' kinder queer an' sick: "I been hearin' the hens 'cluckin' an' the roosters crowin' all the durn day. I been listenin' t' the cows lowin' an' everythin' else kickin' up till I can't stand it no more. It's spring an' I'm feelin' damned," he says. "Damned like an old bare hickory tree fit on'y fur burnin'," he says. An' then I calc'late I must've looked a mite hopeful, fur he adds real spry and vicious: "But don't git no

fool idee I'm dead. I've sworn t' live a hundred an' I'll do it, if on'y t' spite yer sinful greed! An' now I'm ridin' out t' learn God's message t' me in the spring, like the prophets done. An' yew git back t' yer plowin'," he says. An' he druv off singin' a hymn. I thought he was drunk--'r I'd stopped him goin'.

EBEN--(*scornfully*) No, ye wouldn't! Ye're scared o' him. He's stronger--inside--than both o' ye put together!

PETER--(*sardonically*) An' yew--be yew Samson?

EBEN--I'm gittin' stronger. I kin feel it growin' in me--growin' an' growin'--till it'll bust out--! (*He gets up and puts on his coat and a hat. They watch him, gradually breaking into grins. Eben avoids their eyes sheepishly.*) I'm goin' out fur a spell--up the road.

PETER--T' the village?

SIMEON--T' see Minnie?

EBEN--(*defiantly*) Ay-eh!

PETER--(*jeeringly*) The Scarlet Woman!

SIMEON--Lust--that's what's growin' in ye!

EBEN--Waal--she's purty!

PETER--She's been purty fur twenty year!

SIMEON--A new coat o' paint'll make a heifer out of forty.

EBEN--She hain't forty!

PETER--If she hain't, she's teeterin' on the edge.

EBEN--(*desperately*) What d'yew know--

PETER--All they is . . . Sim knew her--an' then me arter--

SIMEON--An' Paw kin tell yew somethin' too! He was fust!

EBEN--D'ye mean t' say he . . . ?

SIMEON--(*with a grin*) Ay-eh! We air his heirs in everythin'!

EBEN--(*intensely*) That's more to it. That grows on it! It'll bust soon! (*then violently*) I'll go smash my fist in her face! (*He pulls open the door in rear violently.*)

SIMEON--(*with a wink at Peter--drawlingly*) Mebbe--but the night's wa'm--purty--by the time ye git thar mebbe ye'll kiss her instead!

PETER--Sart'n he will! (*They both roar with coarse laughter. Eben rushes out and slams the door--then the outside front door--comes around the corner of the house and stands still by the gate, staring up at the sky.*)

SIMEON--(*looking after him*) Like his Paw.

PETER--Dead spit an' image!

SIMEON--Dog'll eat dog!

PETER--Ay-eh. (*Pause. With yearning*) Mebbe a year from now we'll be in Californi-a.

SIMEON--Ay-eh. (*A pause. Both yawn.*) Let's git t' bed. (*He blows out the candle. They go out door in rear. Eben stretches his arms up to the sky--rebelliously*)

EBEN--Waal--thar's a star, an' somewhar's they's him, an' here's me, an' thar's Min up the road--in the same night. What if I does kiss her? She's like t'night, she's soft 'n' wa'm, her eyes kin wink like a star, her mouth's wa'm, her arms're wa'm, she smells like a wa'm plowed field, she's purty . . . Ay-eh! By God A'mighty she's purty,

an' I don't give a damn how many sins she's sinned afore mine or who she's sinned 'em with, my sin's as purty as any one on 'em! (*He strides off down the road to the left.*)

SCENE THREE

It is the pitch darkness just before dawn. Eben comes in from the left and goes around to the porch, feeling his way, chuckling bitterly and cursing half-aloud to himself.

EBEN--The cussed old miser! (*He can be heard going in the front door. There is a pause as he goes upstairs, then a loud knock on the bedroom door of the brothers.*) Wake up!

SIMEON--(*startledly*) Who's thar?

EBEN--(*pushing open the door and coming in, a lighted candle in his hand. The bedroom of the brothers is revealed. Its ceiling is the sloping roof. They can stand upright only close to the center dividing wall of the upstairs. Simeon and Peter are in a double bed, front. Eben's cot is to the rear. Eben has a mixture of silly grin and vicious scowl on his face.*) I be!

PETER--(*angrily*) What in hell's-fire . . . ?

EBEN--I got news fur ye! Ha! (*He gives one abrupt sardonic guffaw.*)

SIMEON--(*angrily*) Couldn't ye hold it 'til we'd got our sleep?

EBEN--It's nigh sunup. (*then explosively*) He's gone an' married agen!

SIMEON AND PETER--(*explosively*) Paw?

EBEN--Got himself hitched to a female 'bout thirty-five--an' purty, they says . . .

SIMEON--(*aghast*) It's a durn lie!

PETER--Who says?

SIMEON--They been stringin' ye!

EBEN--Think I'm a dunce, do ye? The hull village says. The preacher from New Dover, he brung the news--told it t' our preacher--New Dover, that's whar the old loon got himself hitched--that's whar the woman lived--

PETER--(*no longer doubting--stunned*) Waal . . . !

SIMEON--(*the same*) Waal . . . !

EBEN--(*sitting down on a bed--with vicious hatred*) Ain't he a devil out o' hell? It's jest t' spite us--the damned old mule!

PETER--(*after a pause*) Everythin'll go t' her now.

SIMEON--Ay-eh. (*a pause--dully*) Waal--if it's done--

PETER--It's done us. (*pause--then persuasively*) They's gold in the fields o' Californi-a, Sim. No good a-stayin' here now.

SIMEON--Jest what I was a-thinkin'. (*then with decision*) S'well fust's last! Let's light out and git this mornin'.

PETER--Suits me.

EBEN--Ye must like walkin'.

SIMEON--(*sardonically*) If ye'd grow wings on us we'd fly thar!

EBEN--Ye'd like ridin' better--on a boat, wouldn't ye? (*fumbles in his pocket and takes out a crumpled sheet of foolscap*) Waal, if ye

sign this ye kin ride on a boat. I've had it writ out an' ready in case ye'd ever go. It says fur three hundred dollars t' each ye agree yewr shares o' the farm is sold t' me. (*They look suspiciously at the paper. A pause.*)

SIMEON--(*wonderingly*) But if he's hitched agen--

PETER--An' whar'd yew git that sum o' money, anyways?

EBEN--(*cunningly*) I know whar it's hid. I been waitin'--Maw told me. She knew whar it lay fur years, but she was waitin' . . . It's her'n--the money he hoarded from her farm an' hid from Maw. It's my money by rights now.

PETER--Whar's it hid?

EBEN--(*cunningly*) Whar yew won't never find it without me. Maw spied on him--'r she'd never knowed. (*A pause. They look at him suspiciously, and he at them.*) Waal, is it fa'r trade?

SIMEON--Dunno.

PETER--Dunno.

SIMEON--(*looking at window*) Sky's grayin'.

PETER--Ye better start the fire, Eben.

SIMEON--An' fix some vittles.

EBEN--Ay-eh. (*then with a forced jocular heartiness*) I'll git ye a good one. If ye're startin' t' hoof it t' Californi-a ye'll need somethin' that'll stick t' yer ribs. (*He turns to the door, adding meaningly*) But ye kin ride on a boat if ye'll swap. (*He stops at the door and pauses. They stare at him.*)

SIMEON--(*suspiciously*) Whar was ye all night?

EBEN--(*defiantly*) Up t' Min's. (*then slowly*) Walkin' thar, fust I felt 's if I'd kiss her; then I got a-thinkin' o' what ye'd said o' him an' her an' I says, I'll bust her nose fur that! Then I got t' the village an' heerd the news an' I got madder'n hell an' run all the way t' Min's not knowin' what I'd do--(*He pauses--then sheepishly but more defiantly*) Waal--when I seen her, I didn't hit her--nor I didn't kiss her nuther--I begun t' beller like a calf an' cuss at the same time, I was so durn mad--an' she got scared--an' I jest grabbed holt an' tuk her! (*proudly*) Yes, siree! I tuk her. She may've been his'n--an' your'n, too--but she's mine now!

SIMEON--(*dryly*) In love, air yew?

EBEN--(*with lofty scorn*) Love! I don't take no stock in sech slop!

PETER--(*winking at Simeon*) Mebbe Eben's aimin' t' marry, too.

SIMEON--Min'd make a true faithful he'pmeet! (*They snicker.*)

EBEN--What do I care fur her--'ceptin' she's round an' wa'm? The p'int is she was his'n--an' now she b'longs t' me! (*He goes to the door--then turns--rebelliously*) An' Min hain't sech a bad un. They's worse'n Min in the world, I'll bet ye! Wait'll we see this cow the Old Man's hitched t'! She'll beat Min, I got a notion! (*He starts to go out.*)

SIMEON--(*suddenly*) Mebbe ye'll try t' make her your'n, too?

PETER--Ha! (*He gives a sardonic laugh of relish at this idea.*)

EBEN--(*spitting with disgust*) Her--here--sleepin' with him--stealin' my Maw's farm! I'd as soon pet a skunk 'r kiss a snake! (*He goes out. The two stare after him suspiciously. A pause. They listen to his steps receding.*)

PETER--He's startin' the fire.

SIMEON--I'd like t' ride t' Californi-a--but--

PETER--Min might o' put some scheme in his head.

SIMEON--Mebbe it's all a lie 'bout Paw marryin'. We'd best wait an' see the bride.

PETER--An' don't sign nothin' till we does!

SIMEON--Nor till we've tested it's good money! (*then with a grin*) But if Paw's hitched we'd be sellin' Eben somethin' we'd never git nohow!

PETER--We'll wait an' see. (*then with sudden vindictive anger*) An' till he comes, let's yew 'n' me not wuk a lick, let Eben tend to thin's if he's a mind t', let's us jest sleep an' eat an' drink likker, an' let the hull damned farm go t' blazes!

SIMEON--(*excitedly*) By God, we've 'arned a rest! We'll play rich fur a change. I hain't a-going to stir outa bed till breakfast's ready.

PETER--An' on the table!

SIMEON--(*after a pause--thoughtfully*) What d'ye calc'late she'll be like--our new Maw? Like Eben thinks?

PETER--More'n' likely.

SIMEON--(*vindictively*) Waal--I hope she's a she-devil that'll make him wish he was dead an' livin' in the pit o' hell fur comfort!

PETER--(*fervently*) Amen!

SIMEON--(*imitating his father's voice*) "I'm ridin' out t' learn God's message t' me in the spring like the prophets done," he says. I'll bet right then an' thar he knew plumb well he was goin' whorin', the stinkin' old hypocrite!

SCENE FOUR

Same as Scene Two--shows the interior of the kitchen with a lighted candle on table. It is gray dawn outside. Simeon and Peter are just finishing their breakfast. Eben sits before his plate of untouched food, brooding frowningly.

PETER--(*glancing at him rather irritably*) Lookin' glum don't help none.

SIMEON--(*sarcastically*) Sorrowin' over his lust o' the flesh!

PETER--(*with a grin*) Was she yer fust?

EBEN--(*angrily*) None o' yer business. (*a pause*) I was thinkin' o' him. I got a notion he's gittin' near--I kin feel him comin' on like yew kin feel malaria chill afore it takes ye.

PETER--It's too early yet.

SIMEON--Dunno. He'd like t' catch us nappin'--jest t' have somethin' t' hoss us 'round over.

PETER--(*mechanically gets to his feet. Simeon does the same.*)
Waal--let's git t' wuk. (*They both plod mechanically toward the door before they realize. Then they stop short.*)

SIMEON--(*grinning*) Ye're a cussed fool, Pete--and I be wuss! Let him see we hain't wukin'! We don't give a durn!

PETER--(*as they go back to the table*) Not a damned durn! It'll serve t' show him we're done with him. (*They sit down again. Eben stares from one to the other with surprise.*)

SIMEON--(*grins at him*) We're aimin' t' start bein' lilies o' the field.

PETER--Nary a toil 'r spin 'r lick o' wuk do we put in!

SIMEON--Ye're sole owner--till he comes--that's what ye wanted.
Waal, ye got t' be sole hand, too.

PETER--The cows air bellerin'. Ye better hustle at the milkin'.

EBEN--(*with excited joy*) Ye mean ye'll sign the paper?

SIMEON--(*dryly*) Mebbe.

PETER--Mebbe.

SIMEON--We're considerin'. (*peremptorily*) Ye better git t' wuk.

EBEN--(*with queer excitement*) It's Maw's farm agen! It's my farm!
Them's my cows! I'll milk my durn fingers off fur cows o' mine!
(*He goes out door in rear, they stare after him indifferently.*)

SIMEON--Like his Paw.

PETER--Dead spit 'n' image!

SIMEON--Waal--let dog eat dog! (*Eben comes out of front door and around the corner of the house. The sky is beginning to grow flushed with sunrise. Eben stops by the gate and stares around him with glowing, possessive eyes. He takes in the whole farm with his embracing glance of desire.*)

EBEN--It's purty! It's damned purty! It's mine! (*He suddenly throws his head back boldly and glares with hard, defiant eyes at the sky.*)
Mine, d'ye hear? Mine! (*He turns and walks quickly off left, rear, toward the barn. The two brothers light their pipes.*)

SIMEON--(*putting his muddy boots up on the table, tilting back his chair, and puffing defiantly*) Waal--this air solid comfort--fur once.

PETER--Ay-eh. (*He follows suit. A pause. Unconsciously they both sigh.*)

SIMEON--(*suddenly*) He never was much o' a hand at milkin', Eben wa'n't.

PETER--(*with a snort*) His hands air like hoofs! (*a pause*)

SIMEON--Reach down the jug thar! Let's take a swaller. I'm feelin' kind o' low.

PETER--Good idee! (*He does so--gets two glasses--they pour out drinks of whisky.*) Here's t' the gold in Californi-a!

SIMEON--An' luck t' find it! (*They drink--puff resolutely--sigh--take their feet down from the table.*)

PETER--Likker don't 'pear t' sot right.

SIMEON--We hain't used t' it this early. (*A pause. They become very restless.*)

PETER--Gittin' close in this kitchen.

SIMEON--(*with immense relief*) Let's git a breath o' air. (*They arise briskly and go out rear--appear around house and stop by the gate. They stare up at the sky with a numbed appreciation.*)

PETER--Purty!

SIMEON--Ay-eh. Gold's t' the East now.

PETER--Sun's startin' with us fur the Golden West.

SIMEON--(*staring around the farm, his compressed face tightened, unable to conceal his emotion*) Waal--it's our last mornin'--mebbe.

PETER--(*the same*) Ay-eh.

SIMEON--(*stamps his foot on the earth and addresses it desperately*) Waal--ye've thirty year o' me buried in ye--spread out

over ye--blood an' bone an' sweat--rotted away--fertilizin' ye--richin' yer soul--prime manure, by God, that's what I been t' ye!

PETER--Ay-eh! An' me!

SIMEON--An' yew, Peter. (*He sighs--then spits.*) Waal--no use'n cryin' over spilt milk.

PETER--They's gold in the West--an' freedom, mebbe. We been slaves t' stone walls here.

SIMEON--(*defiantly*) We hain't nobody's slaves from this out--nor no thin's slaves nuther. (*a pause--restlessly*) Speakin' o' milk, wonder how Eben's managin'?

PETER--I s'pose he's managin'.

SIMEON--Mebbe we'd ought t' help--this once.

PETER--Mebbe. The cows knows us.

SIMEON--An' likes us. They don't know him much.

PETER--An' the hosses, an' pigs, an' chickens. They don't know him much.

SIMEON--They knows us like brothers--an' likes us! (*proudly*) Hain't we raised 'em t' be fust-rate, number one prize stock?

PETER--We hain't--not no more.

SIMEON--(*dully*) I was fergittin'. (*then resignedly*) Waal, let's go help Eben a spell an' git waked up.

PETER--Suits me. (*They are starting off down left, rear, for the barn when Eben appears from there hurrying toward them, his face excited.*)

EBEN--(*breathlessly*) Waal--har they be! The old mule an' the bride! I seen 'em from the barn down below at the turnin'.

PETER--How could ye tell that far?

EBEN--Hain't I as far-sight as he's near-sight? Don't I know the mare 'n' buggy, an' two people settin' in it? Who else . . . ? An' I tell ye I kin feel 'em a-comin', too! (*He squirms as if he had the itch.*)

PETER--(*beginning to be angry*) Waal--let him do his own unhitchin'!

SIMEON--(*angry in his turn*) Let's hustle in an' git our bundles an' be a-goin' as he's a-comin'. I don't want never t' step inside the door agen arter he's back. (*They both start back around the corner of the house. Eben follows them.*)

EBEN--(*anxiously*) Will ye sign it afore ye go?

PETER--Let's see the color o' the old skinflint's money an' we'll sign. (*They disappear left. The two brothers clump upstairs to get their bundles. Eben appears in the kitchen, runs to window, peers out, comes back and pulls up a strip of flooring in under stove, takes out a canvas bag and puts it on table, then sets the floorboard back in place. The two brothers appear a moment after. They carry old carpet bags.*)

EBEN--(*puts his hand on bag guardingly*) Have ye signed?

SIMEON--(*shows paper in his hand*) Ay-eh. (*greedily*) Be that the money?

EBEN--(*opens bag and pours out pile of twenty-dollar gold pieces*) Twenty-dollar pieces--thirty on 'em. Count 'em. (*Peter does so, arranging them in stacks of five, biting one or two to test them.*)

PETER--Six hundred. (*He puts them in bag and puts it inside his shirt carefully.*)

SIMEON--(*handing paper to Eben*) Har ye be.

EBEN--(*after a glance, folds it carefully and hides it under his shirt--gratefully*) Thank yew.

PETER--Thank yew fur the ride.

SIMEON--We'll send ye a lump o' gold fur Christmas. (*A pause. Eben stares at them and they at him.*)

PETER--(*awkwardly*) Waal--we're a-goin'.

SIMEON--Comin' out t' the yard?

EBEN--No. I'm waitin' in here a spell. (*Another silence. The brothers edge awkwardly to door in rear--then turn and stand.*)

SIMEON--Waal--good-by.

PETER--Good-by.

EBEN--Good-by. (*They go out. He sits down at the table, faces the stove and pulls out the paper. He looks from it to the stove. His face, lighted up by the shaft of sunlight from the window, has an expression of trance. His lips move. The two brothers come out to the gate.*)

PETER--(*looking off toward barn*) Thar he be--unhitchin'.

SIMEON--(*with a chuckle*) I'll bet ye he's riled!

PETER--An' thar she be.

SIMEON--Let's wait 'n' see what our new Maw looks like.

PETER--(*with a grin*) An' give him our partin' cuss!

SIMEON--(*grinning*) I feel like raisin' fun. I feel light in my head an' feet.

PETER--Me, too. I feel like laffin' till I'd split up the middle.

SIMEON--Reckon it's the likker?

PETER--No. My feet feel itchin' t' walk an' walk--an' jump high over thin's--an'. . . .

SIMEON--Dance? (*a pause*)

PETER--(*puzzled*) It's plumb onnateral.

SIMEON--(*a light coming over his face*) I calc'late it's 'cause school's out. It's holiday. Fur once we're free!

PETER--(*dazedly*) Free?

SIMEON--The halter's broke--the harness is busted--the fence bars is down--the stone walls air crumblin' an' tumblin'! We'll be kickin' up an' tearin' away down the road!

PETER--(*drawing a deep breath--oratorically*) Anybody that wants this stinkin' old rock-pile of a farm kin hev it. T'ain't our'n, no sirree!

SIMEON--(*takes the gate off its hinges and puts it under his arm*) We harby 'bolishes shet gates, an' open gates, an' all gates, by thunder!

PETER--We'll take it with us fur luck an' let 'er sail free down some river.

SIMEON--(*as a sound of voices comes from left, rear*) Har they comes! (*The two brothers congeal into two stiff, grim-visaged statues. Ephraim Cabot and Abbie Putnam come in. Cabot is*

seventy-five, tall and gaunt, with great, wiry, concentrated power, but stoop-shouldered from toil. His face is as hard as if it were hewn out of a boulder, yet there is a weakness in it, a petty pride in its own narrow strength. His eyes are small, close together, and extremely near-sighted, blinking continually in the effort to focus on objects, their stare having a straining, ingrowing quality. He is dressed in his dismal black Sunday suit. Abbie is thirty-five, buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes, and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed, desperate quality which is so apparent in Eben.)

CABOT--(as they enter--a queer strangled emotion in his dry cracking voice) Har we be t' hum, Abbie.

ABBIE--(with lust for the word) Hum! (her eyes gloating on the house without seeming to see the two stiff figures at the gate) It's purty--purty! I can't b'lieve it's r'ally mine.

CABOT--(sharply) Yewr'n? Mine! (He stares at her penetratingly. She stares back. He adds reluctantly) Our'n--mebbe! It was lonesome too long. I was growin' old in the spring. A hum's got t' hev a woman.

ABBIE--(her voice taking possession) A woman's got t' hev a hum!

CABOT--(nodding uncertainly) Ay-eh. (then irritably) Whar be they? Ain't thar nobody about--'r wukin'--'r nothin'?

ABBIE--(sees the brothers. She returns their stare of cold appraising contempt with interest--slowly) Thar's two men loafin' at the gate an' starin' at me like a couple o' strayed hogs.

CABOT--(*straining his eyes*) I kin see 'em--but I can't make out. . . .

SIMEON--It's Simeon.

PETER--It's Peter.

CABOT--(*exploding*) Why hain't ye wukin'?

SIMEON--(*dryly*) We're waitin' t' welcome ye hum--yew an' the bride!

CABOT--(*confusedly*) Huh? Waal--this be yer new Maw, boys.
(*She stares at them and they at her.*)

SIMEON--(*turns away and spits contemptuously*) I see her!

PETER--(*spits also*) An' I see her!

ABBIE--(*with the conqueror's conscious superiority*) I'll go in an' look at *my* house. (*She goes slowly around to porch.*)

SIMEON--(*with a snort*) Her house!

PETER--(*calls after her*) Ye'll find Eben inside. Ye better not tell him it's yewr house.

ABBIE--(*mouthin' the name*) Eben. (*then quietly*) I'll tell Eben.

CABOT--(*with a contemptuous sneer*) Ye needn't heed Eben. Eben's a dumb fool--like his Maw--soft an' simple!

SIMEON--(*with his sardonic burst of laughter*) Ha! Eben's a chip o' yew--spit 'n' image--hard 'n' bitter's a hickory tree! Dog'll eat dog. He'll eat ye yet, old man!

CABOT--(*commandingly*) Ye git t' wuk!

SIMEON--(*as Abbie disappears in house--winks at Peter and says tauntingly*) So that thar's our new Maw, be it? Whar in hell did ye dig her up? (*He and Peter laugh.*)

PETER--Ha! Ye'd better turn her in the pen with the other sows. (*They laugh uproariously, slapping their thighs.*)

CABOT--(*so amazed at their effrontery that he stutters in confusion*) Simeon! Peter! What's come over ye? Air ye drunk?

SIMEON--We're free, old man--free o' yew an' the hull damned farm! (*They grow more and more hilarious and excited.*)

PETER--An' we're startin' out fur the gold fields o' Californi-a!

SIMEON--Ye kin take this place an' burn it!

PETER--An' bury it--fur all we cares!

SIMEON--We're free, old man! (*He cuts a caper.*)

PETER--Free! (*He gives a kick in the air.*)

SIMEON--(*in a frenzy*) Whoop.

PETER--Whoop! (*They do an absurd Indian war dance about the old man, who is petrified between rage and the fear that they are insane.*)

SIMEON--We're free as Injuns! Lucky we don't skulp ye!

PETER--An' burn yer barn an' kill the stock!

SIMEON--An' rape yer new woman! Whoop! (*He and Peter stop their dance, holding their sides, rocking with wild laughter.*)

CABOT--(*edging away*) Lust fur gold--fur the sinful, easy gold o' Californi-a! It's made ye mad!

SIMEON--(*tauntingly*) Wouldn't ye like us to send ye back some sinful gold, ye old sinner?

PETER--They's gold besides what's in Californi-a! (*He retreats back beyond the vision of the old man and takes the bag of money and flaunts it in the air above his head, laughing.*)

SIMEON--And sinfuller, too!

PETER--We'll be voyagin' on the sea! Whoop! (*He leaps up and down.*)

SIMEON--Livin' free! Whoop! (*He leaps in turn.*)

CABOT--(*suddenly roaring with rage*) My cuss on ye!

SIMEON--Take our'n in trade fur it! Whoop!

CABOT--I'll hev ye both chained up in the asylum!

PETER--Ye old skinflint! Good-by!

SIMEON--Ye old blood sucker! Good-by!

CABOT--Go afore I . . . !

PETER--Whoop! (*He picks a stone from the road. Simeon does the same.*)

SIMEON--Maw'll be in the parlor.

PETER--Ay-eh! One! Two!

CABOT--(*frightened*) What air ye . . . ?

PETER--Three! (*They both throw, the stones hitting the parlor window with a crash of glass, tearing the shade.*)

SIMEON--Whoop!

PETER--Whoop!

CABOT--(*in a fury now, rushing toward them*) If I kin lay hands on ye--I'll break yer bones fur ye! (*But they beat a capering retreat before him, Simeon with the gate still under his arm. Cabot comes back, panting with impotent rage. Their voices as they go off take up the song of the gold-seekers to the old tune of "Oh, Susannah!"*)

"I jumped aboard the Liza ship,
And traveled on the sea,
And every time I thought of home
I wished it wasn't me!
Oh! Californi-a,
That's the land fur me!
I'm off to Californi-a!
With my wash bowl on my knee."

(*In the meantime, the window of the upper bedroom on right is raised and Abbie sticks her head out. She looks down at Cabot--with a sigh of relief*)

ABBIE--Waal--that's the last o' them two, hain't it? (*He doesn't answer. Then in possessive tones*) This here's a nice bedroom, Ephraim. It's a r'al nice bed. Is it my room, Ephraim?

CABOT--(*grimly--without looking up*) Our'n! (*She cannot control a grimace of aversion and pulls back her head slowly and shuts the window. A sudden horrible thought seems to enter Cabot's head.*) They been up to somethin'! Mebbe--mebbe they've pizened the stock--'r somethin'! (*He almost runs off down toward the barn. A moment later the kitchen door is slowly pushed open and Abbie enters. For a moment she stands looking at Eben. He does not notice her at first. Her eyes take him in penetratingly with a calculating appraisal of his strength as against hers. But under this her desire is dimly awakened by his youth and good looks. Suddenly*

he becomes conscious of her presence and looks up. Their eyes meet. He leaps to his feet, glowering at her speechlessly.)

ABBIE--(in her most seductive tones which she uses all through this scene) Be you--Eben? I'm Abbie--(She laughs.) I mean, I'm yer new Maw.

EBEN--(viciously) No, damn ye!

ABBIE--(as if she hadn't heard--with a queer smile) Yer Paw's spoke a lot o' yew. . . .

EBEN--Ha!

ABBIE--Ye mustn't mind him. He's an old man. (A long pause. They stare at each other.) I don't want t' pretend playin' Maw t' ye, Eben. (admiringly) Ye're too big an' too strong fur that. I want t' be frens with ye. Mebbe with me fur a fren ye'd find ye'd like livin' here better. I kin make it easy fur ye with him, mebbe. (with a scornful sense of power) I calc'late I kin git him t' do most anythin' fur me.

EBEN--(with bitter scorn) Ha! (They stare again, Eben obscurely moved, physically attracted to her--in forced stilted tones) Yew kin go t' the devil!

ABBIE--(calmly) If cussin' me does ye good, cuss all ye've a mind t'. I'm all prepared t' have ye agin me--at fust. I don't blame ye nuther. I'd feel the same at any stranger comin' t' take my Maw's place. (He shudders. She is watching him carefully.) Yew must've cared a lot fur yewr Maw, didn't ye? My Maw died afore I'd growed. I don't remember her none. (a pause) But yew won't hate me long, Eben. I'm not the wust in the world--an' yew an' me've got a lot in common. I kin tell that by lookin' at ye. Waal--I've had a

hard life, too--oceans o' trouble an' nuthin' but wuk fur reward. I was a orphan early an' had t' wuk fur others in other folks' hums. Then I married an' he turned out a drunken spreer an' so he had to wuk fur others an' me too agen in other folks' hums, an' the baby died, an' my husband got sick an' died too, an' I was glad sayin' now I'm free fur once, on'y I diskivered right away all I was free fur was t' wuk agen in other folks' hums, doin' other folks' wuk till I'd mos' give up hope o' ever doin' my own wuk in my own hum, an' then your Paw come. . . . *(Cabot appears returning from the barn. He comes to the gate and looks down the road the brothers have gone. A faint strain of their retreating voices is heard: "Oh, Californi-a! That's the place for me." He stands glowering, his fist clenched, his face grim with rage.)*

EBEN--*(fighting against his growing attraction and sympathy--harshly)* An' bought yew--like a harlot! *(She is stung and flushes angrily. She has been sincerely moved by the recital of her troubles. He adds furiously)* An' the price he's payin' ye--this farm--was my Maw's, damn ye!--an' mine now!

ABBIE--*(with a cool laugh of confidence)* Yewr'n? We'll see 'bout that! *(then strongly)* Waal--what if I did need a hum? What else'd I marry an old man like him fur?

EBEN--*(maliciously)* I'll tell him ye said that!

ABBIE--*(smiling)* I'll say ye're lyin' a-purpose--an' he'll drive ye off the place!

EBEN--Ye devil!

ABBIE--*(defying him)* This be my farm--this be my hum--this be my kitchen!

EBEN--(*furiously, as if he were going to attack her*) Shut up, damn ye!

ABBIE--(*walks up to him--a queer coarse expression of desire in her face and body--slowly*) An' upstairs--that be my bedroom--an' my bed! (*He stares into her eyes, terribly confused and torn. She adds softly*) I hain't bad nor mean--'ceptin' fur an enemy--but I got t' fight fur what's due me out o' life, if I ever 'spect t' git it. (*then putting her hand on his arm--seductively*) Let's yew 'n' me be frends, Eben.

EBEN--(*stupidly--as if hypnotized*) Ay-eh. (*then furiously flinging off her arm*) No, ye durned old witch! I hate ye! (*He rushes out the door.*)

ABBIE--(*looks after him smiling satisfiedly--then half to herself, mouthing the word*) Eben's nice. (*She looks at the table, proudly.*) I'll wash up my dishes now. (*Eben appears outside, slamming the door behind him. He comes around corner, stops on seeing his father, and stands staring at him with hate.*)

CABOT--(*raising his arms to heaven in the fury he can no longer control*) Lord God o' Hosts, smite the undutiful sons with Thy wust cuss!

EBEN--(*breaking in violently*) Yew 'n' yewr God! Allus cussin' folks--allus naggin' em!

CABOT--(*oblivious to him--summoningly*) God o' the old! God o' the lonesome!

EBEN--(*mockingly*) Naggin' His sheep t' sin! T' hell with yewr God! (*Cabot turns. He and Eben glower at each other.*)

CABOT--(*harshly*) So it's yew. I might've knowed it. (*shaking his finger threateningly at him*) Blasphemin' fool! (*then quickly*) Why hain't ye t' wuk?

EBEN--Why hain't yew? They've went. I can't wuk it all alone.

CABOT--(*contemptuously*) Nor noways! I'm wuth ten o' ye yit. old's I be! Ye'll never be more'n half a man! (*then, matter-of-factly*) Waal--let's git t' the barn. (*They go. A last faint note of the "Californi-a" song is heard from the distance. Abbie is washing her dishes.*)

(*The Curtain Falls*)

PART II

SCENE ONE

The exterior of the farmhouse, as in Part One--a hot Sunday afternoon two months later. Abbie, dressed in her best, is discovered sitting in a rocker at the end of the porch. She rocks listlessly, enervated by the heat, staring in front of her with bored, half-closed eyes.

Eben sticks his head out of his bedroom window. He looks around furtively and tries to see--or hear--if anyone is on the porch, but although he has been careful to make no noise, Abbie has sensed his movement. She stops rocking, her face grows animated and eager, she waits attentively. Eben seems to feel her presence, he scowls back his thoughts of her and spits with exaggerated

disdain--then withdraws back into the room. Abbie waits, holding her breath as she listens with passionate eagerness for every sound within the house.

Eben comes out. Their eyes meet. His falter, he is confused, he turns away and slams the door resentfully. At this gesture, Abbie laughs tantalizingly, amused but at the same time piqued and irritated. He scowls, strides off the porch to the path and starts to walk past her to the road with a grand swagger of ignoring her existence. He is dressed in his store suit, spruced up, his face shines from soap and water. Abbie leans forward on her chair, her eyes hard and angry now, and, as he passes her, gives a sneering, taunting chuckle.

EBEN--*(stung--turns on her furiously)* What air yew cacklin' 'bout?

ABBIE--*(triumphant)* Yew!

EBEN--What about me?

ABBIE--Ye look all slicked up like a prize bull.

EBEN--*(with a sneer)* Waal--ye hain't so durned putty yerself, be ye? *(They stare into each other's eyes, his held by hers in spite of himself, hers glowingly possessive. Their physical attraction becomes a palpable force quivering in the hot air.)*

ABBIE--*(softly)* Ye don't mean that, Eben. Ye may think ye mean it, mebbe, but ye don't. Ye can't. It's agin nature, Eben. Ye been fightin' yer nature ever since the day I come--tryin' t' tell yerself I hain't purty t' ye. *(She laughs a low humid laugh without taking her eyes from his. A pause--her body squirms desirously--she murmurs languorously)* Hain't the sun strong an' hot? Ye kin feel it burnin' into the earth--Nature--makin' thin's grow--bigger 'n' bigger--burnin'

inside ye--makin' ye want t' grow--into somethin' else--till ye're jined with it--an' it's your'n--but it owns ye, too--an' makes ye grow bigger--like a tree--like them elums--(*She laughs again softly, holding his eyes. He takes a step toward her, compelled against his will.*) Nature'll beat ye, Eben. Ye might's well own up t' it fust's last.

EBEN--(*trying to break from her spell--confusedly*) If Paw'd hear ye goin' on. . . . (*resentfully*) But ye've made such a damned idjit out o' the old devil . . . ! (*Abbie laughs.*)

ABBIE--Waal--hain't it easier fur yew with him changed softer?

EBEN--(*defiantly*) No. I'm fightin' him--fightin' yew--fightin' fur Maw's rights t' her hum! (*This breaks her spell for him. He glowers at her.*) An' I'm onto ye. Ye hain't foolin' me a mite. Ye're aimin' t' swaller up everythin' an' make it your'n. Waal, you'll find I'm a heap sight bigger hunk nor yew kin chew! (*He turns from her with a sneer.*)

ABBIE--(*trying to regain her ascendancy--seductively*) Eben!

EBEN--Leave me be! (*He starts to walk away.*)

ABBIE--(*more commandingly*) Eben!

EBEN--(*stops--resentfully*) What d'ye want?

ABBIE--(*trying to conceal a growing excitement*) Whar air ye goin'?

EBEN--(*with malicious nonchalance*) Oh--up the road a spell.

ABBIE--T' the village?

EBEN--(*airily*) Mebbe.

ABBIE--(*excitedly*) T' see that Min, I s'pose?

EBEN--Mebbe.

ABBIE--(*weakly*) What d'ye want t' waste time on her fur?

EBEN--(*revenging himself now--grinning at her*) Ye can't beat Nature, didn't ye say? (*He laughs and again starts to walk away.*)

ABBIE--(*bursting out*) An ugly old hake!

EBEN--(*with a tantalizing sneer*) She's purtier'n yew be!

ABBIE--That every wuthless drunk in the country has. . . .

EBEN--(*tauntingly*) Mebbe--but she's better'n yew. She owns up fa'r 'n' squar' t' her doin's.

ABBIE--(*furiously*) Don't ye dare compare. . . .

EBEN--She don't go sneakin' an' stealin'--what's mine.

ABBIE--(*savagely seizing on his weak point*) Your'n? Yew mean--my farm?

EBEN--I mean the farm yew sold yerself fur like any other old whore--my farm!

ABBIE--(*stung--fiercely*) Ye'll never live t' see the day when even a stinkin' weed on it'll belong t' ye! (*then in a scream*) Git out o' my sight! Go on t' yer slut--disgracin' yer Paw 'n' me! I'll git yer Paw t' norsewhip ye off the place if I want t'! Ye're only livin' here 'cause I tolerate ye! Git along! I hate the sight o' ye! (*She stops, panting and glaring at him.*)

EBEN--(*returning her glance in kind*) An' I hate the sight o' yew! (*He turns and strides off up the road. She follows his retreating figure with concentrated hate. Old Cabot appears coming up from the barn. The hard, grim expression of his face has changed. He*

seems in some queer way softened, mellowed. His eyes have taken on a strange, incongruous dreamy quality. Yet there is no hint of physical weakness about him--rather he looks more robust and younger. Abbie sees him and turns away quickly with unconcealed aversion. He comes slowly up to her.)

CABOT--(*mildly*) War yew an' Eben quarrelin' agen?

ABBIE--(*shortly*) No.

CABOT--Ye was talkin' a'mighty loud. (*He sits down on the edge of porch.*)

ABBIE--(*snappishly*) If ye heerd us they hain't no need askin' questions.

CABOT--I didn't hear what ye said.

ABBIE--(*relieved*) Waal--it wa'n't nothin' t' speak on.

CABOT--(*after a pause*) Eben's queer.

ABBIE--(*bitterly*) He's the dead spit 'n' image o' yew!

CABOT--(*queerly interested*) D'ye think so, Abbie? (*after a pause, ruminatingly*) Me 'n' Eben's allus fit 'n' fit. I never could b'ar him no ways. He's so thunderin' soft--like his Maw.

ABBIE--(*scornfully*) Ay-eh! 'Bout as soft as yew be!

CABOT--(*as if he hadn't heard*) Mebbe I been too hard on him.

ABBIE--(*jeeringly*) Waal--ye're gittin' soft now--soft as slop! That's what Eben was sayin'.

CABOT--(*his face instantly grim and ominous*) Eben was sayin' Waal, he'd best not do nothin' t' try me 'r he'll soon diskiver. . . . (*A*

pause. She keeps her face turned away. His gradually softens. He stares up at the sky.) Purty, hain't it?

ABBIE--(*crossly*) I don't see nothin' purty.

CABOT--The sky. Feels like a wa'm field up thar.

ABBIE--(*sarcastically*) Air yew aimin' to' buy up over the farm too? (*She snickers contemptuously.*)

CABOT--(*strangely*) I'd like t' own my place up thar. (*a pause*) I'm gittin' old, Abbie. I'm gittin' ripe on the bough. (*A pause. She stares at him mystified. He goes on.*) It's allus lonesome cold in the house--even when it's bilin' hot outside. Hain't yew noticed?

ABBIE--No.

CABOT--It's wa'm down t' the barn--nice smellin' an' warm--with the cows. (*a pause*) Cows is queer.

ABBIE--Like yew?

CABOT--Like Eben. (*a pause*) I'm gittin' t' feel resigned t' Eben--jest as I got t' feel 'bout his Maw. I'm gettin' t' learn to b'ar his softness--jest like her'n. I calc'late I c'd a'most take t' him--if he wa'n't sech a dumb fool! (*a pause*) I s'pose it's old age a-creepin' in my bones.

ABBIE--(*indifferently*) Waal--ye hain't dead yet.

CABOT--(*roused*) No. I hain't, yew bet--not by a hell of a sight--I'm sound 'n' tough as hickory! (*then moodily*) But arter three score and ten the Lord warns ye t' prepare. (*a pause*) That's why Eben's come in my head. Now that his cussed sinful brothers is gone their path t' hell, they's no one left but Eben.

ABBIE--(*resentfully*) They's me, hain't they? (*agitatedly*) What's all this sudden likin' ye've tuk to Eben? Why don't ye say nothin' 'bout me? Hain't I yer lawful wife?

CABOT--(*simply*) Ay-eh. Ye be. (*A pause--he stares at her desirously--his eyes grow avid--then with a sudden movement he seizes her hands and squeezes them, declaiming in a queer camp meeting preacher's tempo*) Yew air my Rose o' Sharon! Behold, yew air fair; yer eyes air doves; yer lips air like scarlet; yer two breasts air like two fawns; yer navel be like a round goblet; yer belly be like a heap o' wheat. . . . (*He covers her hand with kisses. She does not seem to notice. She stares before her with hard angry eyes.*)

ABBIE--(*jerking her hands away--harshly*) So ye're plannin' t' leave the farm t' Eben, air ye?

CABOT--(*dazedly*) Leave . . . ? (*then with resentful obstinacy*) I hain't a-givin' it t' no one!

ABBIE--(*remorselessly*) Ye can't take it with ye.

CABOT--(*thinks a moment--then reluctantly*) No, I calc'late not. (*after a pause--with a strange passion*) But if I could, I would, by the Eternal! 'R if I could, in my dyin' hour, I'd set it afire an' watch it burn--this house an' every ear o' corn an' every tree down t' the last blade o' hay! I'd sit an' know it was all a-dying with me an' no one else'd ever own what was mine, what I'd made out o' nothin' with my own sweat 'n' blood! (*a pause--then he adds with a queer affection*) 'Ceptin' the cows. Them I'd turn free.

ABBIE--(*harshly*) An' me?

CABOT--(*with a queer smile*) Ye'd be turned free, too.

ABBIE--(*furiously*) So that's the thanks I git fur marryin' ye--t' have ye change kind to Eben who hates ye, an' talk o' turnin' me out in the road.

CABOT--(*hastily*) Abbie! Ye know I wa'n't. . . .

ABBIE--(*vengefully*) Just let me tell ye a thing or two 'bout Eben! Whar's he gone? T' see that harlot, Min! I tried fur t' stop him. Disgracin' yew an' me--on the Sabbath, too!

CABOT--(*rather guiltily*) He's a sinner--nateral-born. It's lust eatin' his heart.

ABBIE--(*enraged beyond endurance--wildly vindictive*) An' his lust fur me! Kin ye find excuses fur that?

CABOT--(*stares at her--after a dead pause*) Lust--fur yew?

ABBIE--(*defiantly*) He was tryin' t' make love t' me--when ye heerd us quarrelin'.

CABOT--(*stares at her--then a terrible expression of rage comes over his face--he springs to his feet shaking all over.*) By the A'mighty God--I'll end him!

ABBIE--(*frightened now for Eben*) No! Don't ye!

CABOT--(*violently*) I'll git the shotgun an' blow his soft brains t' the top o' them elums!

ABBIE--(*throwing her arms around him*) No! Ephraim!

CABOT--(*pushing her away violently*) I will, by God!

ABBIE--(*in a quieting tone*) Listen, Ephraim. 'Twa'n't nothin' bad--on'y a boy's foolin'--'twa'n't meant serious--jest jokin' an' teasin'. . . .

CABOT--Then why did ye say--lust?

ABBIE--It must hev sounded wusser'n I meant. An' I was mad at thinkin'--ye'd leave him the farm.

CABOT--(*quieter but still grim and cruel*) Waal then, I'll horsewhip him off the place if that much'll content ye.

ABBIE--(*reaching out and taking his hand*) No. Don't think o' me! Ye mustn't drive him off. 'Tain't sensible. Who'll ye get to help ye on the farm? They's no one hereabouts.

CABOT--(*considers this--then nodding his appreciation*) Ye got a head on ye. (*then irritably*) Waal, let him stay. (*He sits down on the edge of the porch. She sits beside him. He murmurs contemptuously*) I oughtn't t' git riled so--at that 'ere fool calf. (*a pause*) But har's the p'int. What son o' mine'll keep on here t' the farm--when the Lord does call me? Simeon an' Peter air gone t' hell--an Eben's follerin' 'em.

ABBIE--They's me.

CABOT--Ye're on'y a woman.

ABBIE--I'm yewr wife.

CABOT--That hain't me. A son is me--my blood--mine. Mine ought t' git mine. An' then it's still mine--even though I be six foot under. D'ye see?

ABBIE--(*giving him a look of hatred*) Ay-eh. I see. (*She becomes very thoughtful, her face growing shrewd, her eyes studying Cabot craftily.*)

CABOT--I'm gittin' old--ripe on the bough. (*then with a sudden forced reassurance*) Not but what I hain't a hard nut t' crack even yet--an' fur many a year t' come! By the Eternal, I kin break most o' the young fellers's backs at any kind o' work any day o' the year!

ABBIE--(*suddenly*) Mebbe the Lord'll give *us* a son.

CABOT--(*turns and stares at her eagerly*) Ye mean--a son--t' me 'n' yew?

ABBIE--(*with a cajoling smile*) Ye're a strong man yet, hain't ye? 'Tain't noways impossible, be it? We know that. Why d'ye stare so? Hain't ye never thought o' that afore? I been thinkin' o' it all along. Ay-eh--an' I been prayin' it'd happen, too.

CABOT--(*his face growing full of joyous pride and a sort of religious ecstasy*) Ye been prayin', Abbie?--fur a son?--t' us?

ABBIE--Ay-eh. (*with a grim resolution*) I want a son now.

CABOT--(*excitedly clutching both of her hands in his*) It'd be the blessin' o' God, Abbie--the blessin' o' God A'mighty on me--in my old age--in my lonesomeness! They hain't nothin' I wouldn't do fur ye then, Abbie. Ye'd hev on'y t' ask it--anythin' ye'd a mind t'!

ABBIE--(*interrupting*) Would ye will the farm t' me then--t' me an' t'?

CABOT--(*vehemently*) I'd do anythin' ye axed, I tell ye! I swar it! May I be everlastin' damned t' hell if I wouldn't! (*He sinks to his knees pulling her down with him. He trembles all over with the fervor of his hopes.*) Pray t' the Lord agen, Abbie. It's the Sabbath! 'I'll jine ye! Two prayers air better nor one. "An' God hearkened unto Rachel"! An' God hearkened unto Abbie! Pray, Abbie! Pray fur him to hearken! (*He bows his head, mumbling. She pretends to do likewise but gives him a side glance of scorn and triumph.*)

SCENE TWO

About eight in the evening. The interior of the two bedrooms on the top floor is shown. Eben is sitting on the side of his bed in the room on the left. On account of the heat he has taken off everything but his undershirt and pants. His feet are bare. He faces front brooding moodily, his chin propped on his hands, a desperate expression on his face.

In the other room Cabot and Abbie are sitting side by side on the edge of their bed, an old four-poster with feather mattress. He is in his night shirt, she in her nightdress. He is still in the queer, excited mood into which the notion of a son has thrown him. Both rooms are lighted dimly and flickeringly by tallow candles.

CABOT--The farm needs a son.

ABBIE--I need a son.

CABOT--Ay-eh. Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew. That's why I clove t' ye in my lonesomeness. (*A pause. He pounds his knee with his fist.*) Me an' the farm has got t' beget a son.

ABBIE--Ye'd best go t' sleep. Ye're gittin' thin's all mixed.

CABOT--(*with an impatient gesture*) No, I hain't. My mind's clear a well. Ye don't know me, that's it. (*He stares hopelessly at the floor.*)

ABBIE--(*indifferently*) Mebbe. (*In the next room Eben gets up and paces up and down distractedly. Abbie hears him. Her eyes fasten on the intervening wall with concentrated attention. Eben stops and stares. Their hot glances seem to meet through the wall. Unconsciously he stretches out his arms for her and she half rises*

Then aware, he mutters a curse at himself and flings himself face downward on the bed, his clenched fists above his head, his face buried in the pillow. Abbie relaxes with a faint sigh but her eyes remain fixed on the wall; she listens with all her attention for some movement from Eben.)

CABOT--*(suddenly raises his head and looks at her--scornfully)* Will ye ever know me--'r will any man 'r woman? *(shaking his head)* No. I calc'late 'twa'n't t' be. *(He turns away. Abbie look at the wall. Then, evidently unable to keep silent about his thoughts, without looking at his wife, he puts out his hand and clutches her knee. She starts violently, looks at him, sees he is not watching her, concentrates again on the wall and pays no attention to what he says.)* Listen, Abbie. When I come here fifty odd year ago--I was jest twenty an' the strongest an' hardest ye ever seen--ten times as strong an' fifty times as hard as Eben. Waal--this place was nothin' but fields o' stones. Folks laughed when I tuk it. They couldn't know what I knowed. When ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's livin' in yew! They wa'n't strong enuf fur that! They reckoned God was easy. They laughed. They don't laugh no more. Some died hereabouts. Some went West an' died. They're all under ground--fur follerin' arter an easy God. God hain't easy. *(He shakes his head slowly.)* An' I growed hard. Folks kept allus sayin' he's a hard man like 'twas sinful t' be hard, so's at last I said back at 'em: Waal then, by thunder, ye'll git me hard an' see how ye like it! *(then suddenly)* But I give in t' weakness once. 'Twas arter I'd been here two year. I got weak--despairful--they was so many stones. They was a party leavin', givin' up, goin' West. I jined 'em. We tracked on 'n' on. We come t' broad medders, plains, whar the soil was black an' rich as gold. Nary a stone. Easy. Ye'd on'y to plow an' sow an' then set an' smoke yer pipe an' watch thin's grow. I could o' been a rich man--

but somethin' in me fit me an' fit me--the voice o' God sayin': "This hain't wuth nothin' t' Me. Git ye back t' hum!" I got afeerd o' that voice an' I lit out back t' hum here, leavin' my claim an' crops t' whoever'd a mind t' take em. Ay-eh. I actooly give up what was rightful mine! God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones! Build my church on a rock--out o' stones an' I'll be in them! That's what He meant t' Peter! (*He sighs heavily--a pause.*) Stones. I picked 'em up an' piled 'em into walls. Ye kin read the years o' my life in them walls, every day a hefted stone, climbin' over the hills up and down, fencin' in the fields that was mine, whar I'd made thin's grow out o' nothin'--like the will o' God, like the servant o' His hand. It wa'n't easy. It was hard an' He made me hard fur it. (*He pauses.*) All the time I kept gittin' lonesomer. I tuk a wife. She bore Simeon an' Peter. She was a good woman. She wuked hard. We was married twenty year. She never knowed me. She helped but she never knowed what she was helpin'. I was allus lonesome. She died. After that it wa'n't so lonesome fur a spell. (*a pause*) I lost count o' the years. I had no time t' fool away countin' 'em. Sim an' Peter helped. The farm grewed. It was all mine! When I thought o' that I didn't feel lonesome. (*a pause*) But ye can't hitch yer mind t' one thin' day an' night. I tuk another wife--Eben's Maw. Her folks was contestin' me at law over my deeds t' the farm--my farm! That's why Eben keeps a-talkin' his fool talk o' this bein' his Maw's farm. She bore Eben. She was purty--but soft. She tried t' be hard. She couldn't. She never knowed me nor nothin'. It was lonesomer 'n hell with her. After a matter o' sixteen odd years, she died. (*a pause*) I lived with the boys. They hated me 'cause I was hard. I hated them 'cause they was soft. They coveted the farm without knowin' what it meant. It made me bitter 'n wormwood. It aged me--them coveting what I'd made fur mine. Then this spring the call come--the voice o' God

cryin' in my wilderness, in my lonesomeness--t' go out an' seek an' find! (*turning to her with strange passion*) I sought ye an' I found ye! Yew air my Rose o' Sharon! Yer eyes air like. . . . (*She has turned a blank face, resentful eyes to his. He stares at her for a moment--then harshly*) Air ye any the wiser fur all I've told ye?

ABBIE--(*confusedly*) Mebbe.

CABOT--(*pushing her away from him--angrily*) Ye don't know nothin'--nor never will. If ye don't hev a son t' redeem ye . . . ! (*This in a tone of cold threat.*)

ABBIE--(*resentfully*) I prayed, hain't I?

CABOT--(*bitterly*) Pray agen--fur understanding!

ABBIE--(*a veiled threat in her tone*) Ye'll have a son out o' me, I promise ye.

CABOT--How kin ye promise?

ABBIE--I got second-sight, mebbe. I kin foretell. (*She gives a queer smile.*)

CABOT--I believe ye have. Ye give me the chills sometimes. (*He shivers.*) It's cold in this house. It's oneasy. They's thin's pokin' about in the dark--in the corners. (*He pulls on his trousers, tucking in his night shirt, and pulls on his boots.*)

ABBIE--(*surprised*) Whar air ye goin'?

CABOT--(*queerly*) Down whar it's restful--whar it's warm--down t' the barn. (*bitterly*) I kin talk t' the cows. They know. They know the farm an' me. They'll give me peace. (*He turns to go out the door.*)

ABBIE--(*a bit frightenedly*) Air ye ailin' tonight, Ephraim?

CABOT--Growin'. Growin' ripe on the bough. (*He turns and goes, his boots clumping down the stairs. Eben sits up with a start, listening. Abbie is conscious of his movement and stares at the wall. Cabot comes out of the house around the corner and stands by the gate, blinking at the sky. He stretches up his hands in a tortured gesture.*) God A'mighty, call from the dark! (*He listens as if expecting an answer. Then his arms drop, he shakes his head and plods off toward the barn. Eben and Abbie stare at each other through the wall. Eben sighs heavily and Abbie echoes it. Both become terribly nervous, uneasy. Finally Abbie gets up and listens, her ear to the wall. He acts as if he saw every move she was making, he becomes resolutely still. She seems driven into a decision--goes out the door in rear determinedly. His eyes follow her. Then as the door of his room is opened softly, he turns away, waits in an attitude of strained fixity. Abbie stands for a second staring at him, her eyes burning with desire. Then with a little cry she runs over and throws her arms about his neck, she pulls his head back and covers his mouth with kisses. At first, he submits dumbly; then he puts his arms about her neck and returns her kisses, but finally, suddenly aware of his hatred, he hurls her away from him, springing to his feet. They stand speechless and breathless, panting like two animals.*)

ABBIE--(*at last--painfully*) Ye shouldn't, Eben--ye shouldn't--I'd make ye happy!

EBEN--(*harshly*) I don't want t' be happy--from yew!

ABBIE--(*helplessly*) Ye do, Eben! Ye do! Why d'ye lie?

EBEN--(*viciously*) I don't take t' ye, I tell ye! I hate the sight o' ye!

ABBIE--(*with an uncertain troubled laugh*) Waal, I kissed ye anyways--an' ye kissed back--yer lips was burnin'--ye can't lie 'bout that! (*intensely*) If ye don't care, why did ye kiss me back--why was yer lips burnin'?

EBEN--(*wiping his mouth*) It was like pizen on 'em. (*then tauntingly*) When I kissed ye back, mebbe I thought 'twas someone else.

ABBIE--(*wildly*) Min?

EBEN--Mebbe.

ABBIE--(*torturedly*) Did ye go t' see her? Did ye r'ally go? I thought ye mightn't. Is that why ye throwed me off jest now?

EBEN--(*sneeringly*) What if it be?

ABBIE--(*raging*) Then ye're a dog, Eben Cabot!

EBEN--(*threateningly*) Ye can't talk that way t' me!

ABBIE--(*with a shrill laugh*) Can't I? Did ye think I was in love with ye--a weak thin' like yew! Not much! I on'y wanted ye fur a purpose o' my own--an' I'll hev ye fur it yet 'cause I'm stronger'n yew be!

EBEN--(*resentfully*) I knowed well it was on'y part o' yer plan t' swaller everythin'!

ABBIE--(*tauntingly*) Mebbe!

EBEN--(*furious*) Git out o' my room!

ABBIE--This air my room an' ye're on'y hired help!

EBEN--(*threateningly*) Git out afore I murder ye!

ABBIE--(*quite confident now*) I hain't a mite afeerd. Ye want me don't ye? Yes, ye do! An' yer Paw's son'll never kill what he wants. Look at yer eyes! They's lust fur me in 'em, burnin' 'em up! Look at yer lips now! They're tremblin' an' longin' t' kiss me, an' yer teeth bite! (*He is watching her now with a horrible fascination. She laughs a crazy triumphant laugh.*) I'm a-goin' t' make all o' this hum my hum! They's one room hain't mine yet, but it's a-goin' t' be tonight. I'm a-goin' down now an' light up! (*She makes him a mocking bow.*) Won't ye come courtin' me in the best parlor, Mister Cabot?

EBEN--(*staring at her--horribly confused--dully*) Don't ye dare! I hain't been opened since Maw died an' was laid out thar! Don't ye . . . ! (*But her eyes are fixed on his so burningly that his will seems to wither before hers. He stands swaying toward her helplessly.*)

ABBIE--(*holding his eyes and putting all her will into her words as she backs out the door*) I'll expect ye afore long, Eben.

EBEN--(*stares after her for a while, walking toward the door. A light appears in the parlor window. He murmurs*) In the parlor (*This seems to arouse connotations for he comes back and puts on his white shirt, collar, half ties the tie mechanically, puts on coat, takes his hat, stands barefooted looking about him in bewilderment, mutters wonderingly*) Maw! Whar air yew? (*then goes slowly toward the door in rear.*)

SCENE THREE

A few minutes later. The interior of the parlor is shown. A grim, repressed room like a tomb in which the family has been interred alive. Abbie sits on the edge of the horsehair sofa. She has lighted

all the candles and the room is revealed in all its preserved ugliness. A change has come over the woman. She looks awed and frightened now, ready to run away.

The door is opened and Eben appears. His face wears an expression of obsessed confusion. He stands staring at her, his arms hanging disjointedly from his shoulders, his feet bare, his hat in his hand.

ABBIE--*(after a pause--with a nervous, formal politeness)* Won't ye set?

EBEN--*(dully)* Ay-eh. *(Mechanically he places his hat carefully on the floor near the door and sits stiffly beside her on the edge of the sofa. A pause. They both remain rigid, looking straight ahead with eyes full of fear.)*

ABBIE--When I fust come in--in the dark--they seemed somethin' here.

EBEN--*(simply)* Maw.

ABBIE--I kin still feel--somethin'.

EBEN--It's Maw.

ABBIE--At fust I was feered o' it. I wanted t' yell an' run. Now--since yew come--seems like it's growin' soft an' kind t' me. *(addressing the air--queerly)* Thank yew.

EBEN--Maw allus loved me.

ABBIE--Mebbe it knows I love yew, too. Mebbe that makes it kind t' me.

EBEN--*(dully)* I dunno. I should think she'd hate ye.

ABBIE--(*with certainty*) No. I kin feel it don't--not no more.

EBEN--Hate ye fur stealin' her place--here in her hum--settin' in her parlor whar she was laid--(*He suddenly stops, staring stupidly before him.*)

ABBIE--What is it, Eben?

EBEN--(*in a whisper*) Seems like Maw didn't want me t' remind ye.

ABBIE--(*excitedly*) I knowed, Eben! It's kind t' me! It don't b'ar me no grudges fur what I never knowed an' couldn't help!

EBEN--Maw b'ars him a grudge.

ABBIE--Waal, so does all o' us.

EBEN--Ay-eh. (*with passion*) I does, by God!

ABBIE--(*taking one of his hands in hers and patting it*) Thar! Don't git riled thinkin' o' him. Think o' yer Maw who's kind t' us. Tell me about yer Maw, Eben.

EBEN--They hain't nothin' much. She was kind. She was good.

ABBIE--(*putting one arm over his shoulder. He does not seem to notice--passionately*) I'll be kind an' good t' ye!

EBEN--Sometimes she used t' sing fur me.

ABBIE--I'll sing fur ye!

EBEN--This was her hum. This was her farm.

ABBIE--This is my hum! This is my farm!

EBEN--He married her t' steal 'em. She was soft an' easy. He couldn't 'preciate her.

ABBIE--He can't 'preciate me!

EBEN--He murdered her with his hardness.

ABBIE--He's murderin' me!

EBEN--She died. (*a pause*) Sometimes she used to sing fur me. (*He bursts into a fit of sobbing.*)

ABBIE--(*both her arms around him--with wild passion*) I'll sing fur ye! I'll die fur ye! (*In spite of her overwhelming desire for him, there is a sincere maternal love in her manner and voice--a horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love.*) Don't cry, Eben! I'll take yer Maw's place! I'll be everythin' she was t' ye! Let me kiss ye, Eben! (*She pulls his head around. He makes a bewildered pretense of resistance. She is tender.*) Don't be afeered! I'll kiss ye pure, Eben--same 's if I was a Maw t' ye--an' ye kin kiss me back 's if yew was my son--my boy--sayin' good-night t' me! Kiss me, Eben. (*They kiss in restrained fashion. Then suddenly wild passion overcomes her. She kisses him lustfully again and again and he flings his arms about her and returns her kisses. Suddenly, as in the bedroom, he frees himself from her violently and springs to his feet. He is trembling all over, in a strange state of terror. Abbie strains her arms toward him with fierce pleading.*) Don't ye leave me, Eben! Can't ye see it hain't enuf--lovin' ye like a Maw--can't ye see it's got t' be that an' more--much more--a hundred times more--fur me t' be happy--fur yew t' be happy?

EBEN--(*to the presence he feels in the room*) Maw! Maw! What d'ye want? What air ye tellin' me?

ABBIE--She's tellin' ye t' love me. She knows I love ye an' I'll be good t' ye. Can't ye feel it? Don't ye know? She's tellin' ye t' love me, Eben!

EBEN--Ay-eh. I feel--mebbe she--but--I can't figger out--why--when ye've stole her place--here in her hum--in the parlor whar she was--

ABBIE--(*fiercely*) She knows I love ye!

EBEN--(*his face suddenly lighting up with a fierce, triumphant grin*) I see it! I sees why. It's her vengeance on him--so's she kin rest quiet in her grave!

ABBIE--(*wildly*) Vengeance o' God on the hull o' us! What d'we give a durn? I love ye, Eben! God knows I love ye! (*She stretches out her arms for him.*)

EBEN--(*throws himself on his knees beside the sofa and grabs her in his arms--releasing all his pent-up passion*) An' I love yew, Abbie!--now I kin say it! I been dyin' fur want o' ye--every hour since ye come! I love ye! (*Their lips meet in a fierce, bruising kiss.*)

SCENE FOUR

Exterior of the farmhouse. It is just dawn. The front door at right is opened and Eben comes out and walks around to the gate. He is dressed in his working clothes. He seems changed. His face wears a bold and confident expression, he is grinning to himself with evident satisfaction. As he gets near the gate, the window of the parlor is heard opening and the shutters are flung back and Abbie sticks her head out. Her hair tumbles over her shoulders in disarray, her face is flushed, she looks at Eben with tender, languorous eyes and calls softly

ABBIE--Eben. (*as he turns--playfully*) Jest one more kiss afore ye go. I'm goin' t' miss ye fearful all day.

EBEN--An' me yew, ye kin bet! (*He goes to her. They kiss several times. He draws away, laughingly*) Thar. That's enuf, hain't it? Ye won't hev none left fur next time.

ABBIE--I got a million o' 'em left fur yew! (*then a bit anxiously*) O'ye r'ally love me, Eben?

EBEN--(*emphatically*) I like ye better'n any gal I ever knowed! That's gospel!

ABBIE--Likin' hain't lovin'.

EBEN--Waal then--I love ye. Now air yew satisfied?

ABBIE--Ay-eh, I be. (*She smiles at him adoringly.*)

EBEN--I better git t' the barn. The old critter's liable t' suspicion an' come sneakin' up.

ABBIE--(*with a confident laugh*) Let him! I kin allus pull the wool over his eyes. I'm goin' t' leave the shutters open and let in the sun n' air. This room's been dead long enuf. Now it's goin't' be my room!

EBEN--(*frowning*) Ay-eh.

ABBIE--(*hastily*) I meant--our room.

EBEN--Ay-eh.

ABBIE--We made it our'n last night, didn't we? We give it life--our lovin' did. (*a pause*)

EBEN--(*with a strange look*) Maw's gone back t' her grave. She kin sleep now.

ABBIE--May she rest in peace! (*then tenderly rebuking*) Ye oughtn't t' talk o' sad thin's--this mornin'.

EBEN--It jest come up in my mind o' itself.

ABBIE--Don't let it. (*He doesn't answer. She yawns.*) Waal, I'm a goin' t' steal a wink o' sleep. I'll tell the Old Man I hain't feelin' per. Let him git his own vittles.

EBEN--I see him comin' from the barn. Ye better look smart an' gi upstairs.

ABBIE--Ay-eh. Good-by. Don't ferget me. (*She throws him a kiss. He grins--then squares his shoulders and awaits his father confidently. Cabot walk slowly up from the left, staring up at the sky with a vague face.*)

EBEN--(*jovially*) Mornin', Paw. Star-gazin' in daylight?

CABOT--Purty, hain't it?

EBEN--(*looking around him possessively*) It's a durned purty farm.

CABOT--I mean the sky.

EBEN--(*grinning*) How d'ye know? Them eyes o' your'n can't see that fur. (*This tickles his humor and he slaps his thigh and laughs.*) Ho-ho! That's a good un!

CABOT--(*grimly sarcastic*) Ye're feelin' right chipper, hain't ye? Whar'd ye steal the likker?

EBEN--(*good-naturedly*) 'Tain't likker. Jest life. (*suddenly holding out his hand--soberly*) Yew 'n' me is quits. Let's shake hands.

CABOT--(*suspiciously*) What's come over ye?

EBEN--Then don't. Mebbe it's jest as well. (*a moment's pause*) What's come over me? (*queerly*) Didn't ye feel her passin'--goin' back t' her grave?

CABOT--(*dully*) Who?

EBEN--Maw. She kin rest now an' sleep content. She's quits with ye.

CABOT--(*confusedly*) I rested. I slept good--down with the cows. They know how t' sleep. They're teachin' me.

EBEN--(*suddenly jovial again*) Good fur the cows! Waal--ye better git t' work.

CABOT--(*grimly amused*) Air yew bossin' me, ye calf?

EBEN--(*beginning to laugh*) Ay-eh! I'm bossin' yew. Ha-ha-ha! See how ye like it! Ha-ha-ha! I'm the prize rooster o' this roost. Ha-ha-ha! (*He goes off toward the barn laughing*)

CABOT--(*looks after him with scornful pity*) Soft-headed. Like his Maw. Dead spit 'n' image. No hope in him! (*He spits with contemptuous disgust.*) A born fool! (*then matter-of-factly*) Waal--I'm gittin' peckish. (*He goes toward door.*)

(*The Curtain Falls*)

PART III

SCENE ONE

A night in late spring the following year. The kitchen and the two bedrooms upstairs are shown. The two bedrooms are dimly lighted by a tallow candle in each. Eben is sitting on the side of the bed in his room, his chin propped on his fists, his face a study of the struggle he is making to understand his conflicting emotions. The

noisy laughter and music from below where a kitchen dance is in progress annoy and distract him. He scowls at the floor.

In the next room a cradle stands beside the double bed.

In the kitchen all is festivity. The stove has been taken down to give more room to the dancers. The chairs, with wooden benches added have been pushed back against the walls. On these are seated squeezed in tight against one another, farmers and their wives and their young folks of both sexes from the neighboring farms. They are all chattering and laughing loudly. They evidently have some secret joke in common. There is no end of winking, of nudging, of meaning nods of the head toward Cabot who, in a state of extreme hilarious excitement increased by the amount he has drunk, is standing near the rear door where there is a small keg of whisky and serving drinks to all the men. In the left corner, front, dividing the attention with her husband, Abbie is sitting in a rocking chair, a shawl wrapped about her shoulders. She is very pale, her face is thin and drawn, her eyes are fixed anxiously on the open door in the rear as if waiting for someone.

The musician is tuning up his fiddle, seated in the far right corner. He is a lanky young fellow with a long, weak face. His pale eyes blink incessantly and he grins about him slyly with a greedy malice.

ABBIE--(suddenly turning to a young girl on her right) Whar' Eben?

YOUNG GIRL--(eying her scornfully) I dunno, Mrs. Cabot. I hain' seen Eben in ages. (meaningly) Seems like he's spent most o' his time t' hum since yew come.

ABBIE--(vaguely) I tuk his Maw's place.

YOUNG GIRL--Ay-eh. So I've heerd. (*She turns away to retail this bit of gossip to her mother sitting next to her. Abbie turns to her left to a big stoutish middle-aged man whose flushed face and starting eyes show the amount of "likker" he has consumed.*)

ABBIE--Ye hain't seen Eben, hev ye?

MAN--No, I hain't. (*Then he adds with a wink*) If yew hain't, who would?

ABBIE--He's the best dancer in the county. He'd ought t' come an' dance.

MAN--(*with a wink*) Mebbe he's doin' the dutiful an' walkin' the kid t' sleep. It's a boy, hain't it?

ABBIE--(*nodding vaguely*) Ay-eh--born two weeks back--purty's a picter.

MAN--They all is--t' their Maws. (*then in a whisper, with a nudge and a leer*) Listen, Abbie--if ye ever git tired o' Eben, remember me! Don't fergit now! (*He looks at her uncomprehending face for a second--then grunts disgustedly.*) Waal--guess I'll likker agin. (*He goes over and joins Cabot, who is arguing noisily with an old farmer over cows. They all drink.*)

ABBIE--(*this time appealing to nobody in particular*) Wonder what Eben's a-doin'? (*Her remark is repeated down the line with many a guffaw and titter until it reaches the fiddler. He fastens his blinking eyes on Abbie.*)

FIDDLER--(*raising his voice*) Bet I kin tell ye, Abbie, what Eben's doin'! He's down t' the church offerin' up prayers o' thanksgivin'. (*They all titter expectantly.*)

A MAN--What fur? (*another titter*)

FIDDLER--'Cause unto him a--*(he hesitates just long enough)*--brother is born! *(A roar of laughter. They all look from Abbie to Cabot. She is oblivious, staring at the door. Cabot, although he hasn't heard the words, is irritated by the laughter and steps forward, glaring about him. There is an immediate silence.)*

CABOT--What're ye all bleatin' about--like a flock o' goats? Why don't ye dance, damn ye? I axed ye here t' dance--t' eat, drink an' be merry--an' thar ye set cacklin' like a lot o' wet hens with the pip! Ye've swilled my likker an' guzzled my vittles like hogs, hain't ye? Then dance fur me, can't ye? That's fa'r an' squar', hain't it? *(A grumble of resentment goes around but they are all evidently in too much awe of him to express it openly.)*

FIDDLER--*(slyly)* We're waitin' fur Eben. *(a suppressed laugh)*

CABOT--*(with a fierce exultation)* T' hell with Eben! Eben's done fur now! I got a new son! *(his mood switching with drunken suddenness)* But ye needn't t' laugh at Eben, none o' ye! He's my blood, if he be a dumb fool. He's better nor any o' yew! He kin do a day's work a'most up t' what I kin--an' that'd put any o' yew pore critters t' shame!

FIDDLER--An' he kin do a good night's work, too! *(a roar of laughter)*

CABOT--Laugh, ye damn fools! Ye're right jist the same, Fiddler! He kin work day an' night too, like I kin, if need be!

OLD FARMER--*(from behind the keg where he is weaving drunkenly back and forth--with great simplicity)* They hain't many t' touch ye, Ephraim--a son at seventy-six. That's a hard man fur ye! I be on'y sixty-eight an' I couldn't do it. *(a roar of laughter in which Cabot joins uproariously)*

CABOT--(*slapping him on the back*) I'm sorry fur ye, Hi. I'd never suspicion sech weakness from a boy like yew!

OLD FARMER--An' I never reckoned yew had it in ye nuther, Ephraim. (*There is another laugh.*)

CABOT--(*suddenly grim*) I got a lot in me--a hell of a lot--folks don't know on. (*turning to the fiddler*) Fiddle 'er up, durn ye! Give 'em somethin' t' dance t'! What air ye, an ornament? Hain't this a celebration? Then grease yer elbow an' go it!

FIDDLER--(*seizes a drink which the old farmer holds out to him and downs it*) Here goes! (*He starts to fiddle "Lady of the Lake."*) Four young fellows and four girls form in two lines and dance a square dance. The fiddler shouts directions for the different movements, keeping his words in the rhythm of the music and interspersing them with jocular personal remarks to the dancers themselves. The people seated along the walls stamp their feet and clap their hands in unison. Cabot is especially active in this respect. Only Abbie remains apathetic, staring at the door as if she were alone in a silent room.)

FIDDLER--Swing your partner t' the right! That's it, Jim! Give her a b'ar hug! Her Maw hain't lookin'. (*laughter*) Change partners! That suits ye, don't it, Essie, now ye got Reub afore ye? Look at her reddened up, will ye? Waal, life is short an' so's love, as the feller says. (*laughter*)

CABOT--(*excitedly, stamping his foot*) Go it, boys! Go it, gals!

FIDDLER--(*with a wink at the others*) Ye're the spryest seventy-six ever I sees, Ephraim! Now if ye'd on'y good eyesight . . . ! (*Suppressed laughter. He gives Cabot no chance to retort but roars*) Promenade! Ye're walkin' like a bride down the aisle, Sarah! Waal,

while they's life they's allus hope, I've heerd tell. Swing you partner to the left! Gosh A'mighty, look at Johnny Cook high steppin'! They hain't goin' t' be much strength left fur howin' in the corn lot t'morrow. (*laughter*)

CABOT--Go it! Go it! (*Then suddenly, unable to restrain himself any longer, he prances into the midst of the dancers, scattering them, waving his arms about wildly.*) Ye're all hoofs! Git out o' my road! Give me room! I'll show ye dancin'. Ye're all too soft! (*He pushes them roughly away. They crowd back toward the walls, muttering, looking at him resentfully.*)

FIDDLER--(*jeeringly*) Go it, Ephraim! Go it! (*He starts "Pop Goes the Weasel," increasing the tempo with every verse until at the end he is fiddling crazily as fast as he can go.*)

CABOT--(*starts to dance, which he does very well and with tremendous vigor. Then he begins to improvise, cuts incredibly grotesque capers, leaping up and cracking his heels together, prancing around in a circle with body bent in an Indian war dance, then suddenly straightening up and kicking as high as he can with both legs. He is like a monkey on a string. And all the while he intersperses his antics with shouts and derisive comments.*) Whoop! Here's dancin' fur ye! Whoop! See that! Seventy-six, if I'm a day Hard as iron yet! Beatin' the young 'uns like I allus done! Look at me! I'd invite ye t' dance on my hundredth birthday on'y ye'll all be dead by then. Ye're a sickly generation! Yer hearts air pink, not red! Yer veins is full o' mud an' water! I be the on'y man in the county Whoop! See that! I'm a Injun! I've killed Injuns in the West afore ye was born--an' skulped 'em too! They's a arrer wound on my backside I c'd show ye! The hull tribe chased me. I outrun 'em all with the arrer stuck in me! An' I tuk vengeance on 'em. Ten eyes fu

an eye, that was my motter. Whoop! Look at me! I kin kick the ceilin' off the room! Whoop!

FIDDLER--(*stops playing--exhaustedly*) God A'mighty, I got enuf. Ye got the devil's strength in ye.

CABOT--(*delightedly*) Did I beat yew, too? Waal, ye played smart. Hev a swig. (*He pours whisky for himself and fiddler. They drink. The others watch Cabot silently with cold, hostile eyes. There is a dead pause. The fiddler rests. Cabot leans against the keg, panting, glaring around him confusedly. In the room above, Eben gets to his feet and tiptoes out the door in rear, appearing a moment later in the other bedroom. He moves silently, even frightenedly, toward the cradle and stands there looking down at the baby. His face is as vague as his reactions are confused, but there is a trace of tenderness, of interested discovery. At the same moment that he reaches the cradle, Abbie seems to sense something. She gets up weakly and goes to Cabot.*)

ABBIE--I'm goin' up t' the baby.

CABOT--(*with real solicitation*) Air ye able fur the stairs? D'ye want me t' help ye, Abbie?

ABBIE--No. I'm able. I'll be down agen soon.

CABOT--Don't ye git wore out! He needs ye, remember--our son does! (*He grins affectionately, patting her on the back. She shrinks from his touch.*)

ABBIE--(*dully*) Don't--tech me. I'm goin'--up. (*She goes. Cabot looks after her. A whisper goes around the room. Cabot turns. It ceases. He wipes his forehead streaming with sweat. He is breathing pantingly.*)

CABOT--I'm a-goin' out t' git fresh air. I'm feelin' a mite dizzy. Fiddle up thar! Dance, all o' ye! Here's likker fur them as wants it. Enjoy yerselves. I'll be back. (*He goes, closing the door behind him.*)

FIDDLER--(*sarcastically*) Don't hurry none on our account! (*A suppressed laugh. He imitates Abbie.*) Whar's Eben? (*more laughter*)

A WOMAN--(*loudly*) What's happened in this house is plain as the nose on yer face! (*Abbie appears in the doorway upstairs and stands looking in surprise and adoration at Eben who does not see her.*)

A MAN--Ssshh! He's li'ble t' be listenin' at the door. That'd be like him. (*Their voices die to an intensive whispering. Their faces are concentrated on this gossip. A noise as of dead leaves in the wind comes from the room. Cabot has come out from the porch and stands by the gate, leaning on it, staring at the sky blinkingly. Abbie comes across the room silently. Eben does not notice her until quite near.*)

EBEN--(*starting*) Abbie!

ABBIE--Ssshh! (*She throws her arms around him. They kiss--then bend over the cradle together.*) Ain't he purty?--dead spit 'n' image o' yew!

EBEN--(*pleased*) Air he? I can't tell none.

ABBIE--E-zactly like!

EBEN--(*frowningly*) I don't like this. I don't like lettin' on what's mine's his'n. I been doin' that all my life. I'm gittin' t' the end o' b'arin' it!

ABBIE--(*putting her finger on his lips*) We're doin' the best we kin. We got t' wait. Somethin's bound t' happen. (*She puts her arms around him.*) I got t' go back.

EBEN--I'm goin' out. I can't b'ar it with the fiddle playin' an' the laughin'.

ABBIE--Don't git feelin' low. I love ye, Eben. Kiss me. (*He kisses her. They remain in each other's arms.*)

CABOT--(*at the gate, confusedly*) Even the music can't drive it out--somethin'. Ye kin feel it droppin' off the elums, climbin' up the roof, sneakin' down the chimney, pokin' in the corners! They's no peace in houses, they's no rest livin' with folks. Somethin's always livin' with ye. (*with a deep sigh*) I'll go t' the barn an' rest a spell. (*He goes wearily toward the barn.*)

FIDDLER--(*tuning up*) Let's celebrate the old skunk gittin' fooled! We kin have some fun now he's went. (*He starts to fiddle "Turkey in the Straw." There is real merriment now. The young folks get up to dance.*)

SCENE TWO

A half hour later--Exterior--Eben is standing by the gate looking up at the sky, an expression of dumb pain bewildered by itself on his face. Cabot appears, returning from the barn, walking wearily, his eyes on the ground. He sees Eben and his whole mood immediately changes. He becomes excited, a cruel, triumphant grin comes to his lips, he strides up and slaps Eben on the back. From within comes the whining of the fiddle and the noise of stamping feet and laughing voices.

CABOT--So har ye be!

EBEN--(*startled, stares at him with hatred for a moment--then dully*) Ay-eh.

CABOT--(*surveying him jeeringly*) Why hain't ye been in t' dance? They was all axin' fur ye.

EBEN--Let 'em ax!

CABOT--They's a hull passel o' purty gals.

EBEN--T' hell with 'em!

CABOT--Ye'd ought t' be marryin' one o' 'em soon.

EBEN--I hain't marryin' no one.

CABOT--Ye might 'arn a share o' a farm that way.

EBEN--(*with a sneer*) Like yew did, ye mean? I hain't that kind.

CABOT--(*stung*) Ye lie! 'Twas yer Maw's folks aimed t' steal my farm from me.

EBEN--Other folks don't say so. (*after a pause--defiantly*) An' I got a farm, anyways!

CABOT--(*derisively*) Whar?

EBEN--(*stamps a foot on the ground*) Har!

CABOT--(*throws his head back and laughs coarsely*) Ho-ho! Ye hev, hev ye? Waal, that's a good un!

EBEN--(*controlling himself--grimly*) Ye'll see!

CABOT--(*stares at him suspiciously, trying to make him out--a pause--then with scornful confidence*) Ay-eh. I'll see. So'll ye. It's ye that's blind--blind as a mole underground. (*Eben suddenly laughs,*

one short sardonic bark: Ha. *A pause. Cabot peers at him with renewed suspicion.*) What air ye hawin' 'bout? (*Eben turns away without answering. Cabot grows angry.*) God A'mighty, yew air a dumb dunce! They's nothin' in that thick skull o' your'n but noise--like a empty keg it be! (*Eben doesn't seem to hear. Cabot's rage grows.*) Yewr farm! God A'mighty! If ye wa'n't a born donkey ye'd know ye'll never own stick nor stone on it, specially now arter him bein' born. It's his'n, I tell ye--his'n arter I die--but I'll live a hundred best t' fool ye all--an' he'll be growed then--yewr age a'most! (*Eben laughs again his sardonic Ha. This drives Cabot into a fury.*) Ha? Ye think ye kin git 'round that someways, do ye? Waal, it'll be her'n, too--Abbie's--ye won't git 'round her--she knows yer tricks--she'll be too much fur ye--she wants the farm her'n--she was afeerd o' ye--she told me ye was sneakin' 'round tryin' t' make love t' her t' git her on yer side . . . ye . . . ye mad fool, ye! (*He raises his clenched fists threateningly.*)

EBEN--(*is confronting him, choking with rage*) Ye lie, ye old kunk! Abbie never said no sech thing!

CABOT--(*suddenly triumphant when he sees how shaken Eben is*) She did. An' I says, I'll blow his brains t' the top o' them elums--an' he says no, that hain't sense, who'll ye git t' help ye on the farm in his place--an' then she says yew'n me ought t' have a son--I know ye've kin, she says--an' I says, if we do, ye kin have anythin' I've got ye've a mind t'. An' she says, I wants Eben cut off so's this farm'll be mine when ye die! (*with terrible gloating*) An' that's what's happened, hain't it? An' the farm's her'n! An' the dust o' the road--that's your'n! Ha! Now who's hawin'?

EBEN--(*has been listening, petrified with grief and rage--suddenly laughs wildly and brokenly*) Ha-ha-ha! So that's her sneakin' game--

all along!--like I suspicioned at fust--t' swaller it all--an' me too . . . ! (*madly*) I'll murder her! (*He springs toward the porch, but Cabot is quicker and gets in between.*)

CABOT--No, ye don't!

EBEN--Git out o' my road! (*He tries to throw Cabot aside. They grapple in what becomes immediately a murderous struggle. The old man's concentrated strength is too much for Eben. Cabot gets one hand on his throat and presses him back across the stone wall. At the same moment, Abbie comes out on the porch. With a stifled cry she runs toward them.*)

ABBIE--Eben! Ephraim! (*She tugs at the hand on Eben's throat.* Let go, Ephraim! Ye're chokin' him!

CABOT--(*removes his hand and flings Eben sideways full length on the grass, gasping and choking. With a cry, Abbie kneels beside him, trying to take his head on her lap, but he pushes her away. Cabot stands looking down with fierce triumph.*) Ye needn't t've fret, Abbie, I wa'n't aimin' t' kill him. He hain't wuth hangin' fur--no by a hell of a sight! (*more and more triumphantly*) Seventy-six an' him not thirty yit--an' look whar he be fur thinkin' his Paw was easy! No, by God, I hain't easy! An' him upstairs, I'll raise him t' be like me! (*He turns to leave them.*) I'm goin' in an' dance!--sing an' celebrate! (*He walks to the porch--then turns with a great grin.*) I don't calc'late it's left in him, but if he gits pesky, Abbie, ye jest sing out. I'll come a-runnin' an' by the Eternal, I'll put him across my knee an' birch him! Ha-ha-ha! (*He goes into the house laughing. A moment later his loud "whoop" is heard.*)

ABBIE--(*tenderly*) Eben. Air ye hurt? (*She tries to kiss him, but he pushes her violently away and struggles to a sitting position.*)

EBEN--(*gaspingly*) T' hell--with ye.

ABBIE--(*not believing her ears*) It's me, Eben--Abbie--don't ye know me?

EBEN--(*glowering at her with hatred*) Ay-eh--I know ye--now! (*He suddenly breaks down, sobbing weakly.*)

ABBIE--(*fearfully*) Eben--what's happened t' ye--why did ye look at me 's if ye hated me?

EBEN--(*violently, between sobs and gasps*) I do hate ye! Ye're a whore--a damn trickin' whore!

ABBIE--(*shrinking back horrified*) Eben! Ye don't know what ye're sayin'!

EBEN--(*scrambling to his feet and following her--accusingly*) Ye're nothin' but a stinkin' passel o' lies! Ye've been lyin' t' me every word ye spoke, day an' night, since we fust--done it. Ye've kept sayin' ye loved me. . . .

ABBIE--(*frantically*) I do love ye! (*She takes his hand, but he flings hers away.*)

EBEN--(*unheeding*) Ye've made a fool o' me--a sick, dumb fool--a-purpose! Ye've been on'y playin' yer sneakin', stealin' game all along--gittin' me t' lie with ye so's ye'd hev a son he'd think was his'n, an' makin' him promise he'd give ye the farm and let me eat dust, if ye did git him a son! (*staring at her with anguished, bewildered eyes*) They must be a devil livin' in ye! T'ain't human t' be as bad as that be!

ABBIE--(*stunned--dully*) He told yew . . . ?

EBEN--Hain't it true? It hain't no good in yew lyin'.

ABBIE--(*pleadingly*) Eben, listen--ye must listen--it was long ago-- afore we done nothin'--yew was scornin' me--goin' t' see Min--when I was lovin' ye--an' I said it t' him t' git vengeance on ye!

EBEN--(*unheedingly--with tortured passion*) I wish ye was dead! I wish I was dead along with ye afore this come! (*ragingly*) But I'll git my vengeance too! I'll pray Maw t' come back t' help me--t' put her cuss on yew an' him!

ABBIE--(*brokenly*) Don't ye, Eben! Don't ye! (*She throws herself on her knees before him, weeping.*) I didn't mean t' do bad t' ye! Fergive me, won't ye?

EBEN--(*not seeming to hear her--fiercely*) I'll git squar' with the old skunk--an' yew! I'll tell him the truth 'bout the son he's so proud o'! Then I'll leave ye here t' pizen each other--with Maw comin' out o' her grave at nights--an' I'll go t' the gold fields o' Californi-a whar Sim an' Peter be!

ABBIE--(*terrified*) Ye won't--leave me? Ye can't!

EBEN--(*with fierce determination*) I'm a-goin', I tell ye! I'll git rich thar an' come back an' fight him fur the farm he stole--an' I'll kick ye both out in the road--t' beg an' sleep in the woods--an' yer son along with ye--t' starve an' die! (*He is hysterical at the end.*)

ABBIE--(*with a shudder--humbly*) He's yewr son, too, Eben.

EBEN--(*torturedly*) I wish he never was born! I wish he'd die this minit! I wish I'd never sot eyes on him! It's him--yew havin' him--a-purpose t' steal--that's changed everythin'!

ABBIE--(*gently*) Did ye believe I loved ye--afore he come?

EBEN--Ay-eh--like a dumb ox!

ABBIE--An' ye don't believe no more?

EBEN--B'lieve a lyin' thief! Ha!

ABBIE--(*shudders--then humbly*) An' did ye r'ally love me afore?

EBEN--(*brokenly*) Ay-eh--an' ye was trickin' me!

ABBIE--An' ye don't love me now!

EBEN--(*violently*) I hate ye, I tell ye!

ABBIE--An' ye're truly goin' West--goin't' leave me--all account o' him being born?

EBEN--I'm a-goin' in the mornin'--or may God strike me t' hell!

ABBIE--(*after a pause--with a dreadful cold intensity--slowly*) If that's what his comin's done t' me--killin' yewr love--takin' yew away--my on'y joy--the on'y joy I ever knowed--like heaven t' me--purtier'n heaven--then I hate him, too, even if I be his Maw!

EBEN--(*brokenly*) Lies! Ye love him! He'll steal the farm fur ye! (*brokenly*) But t'ain't the farm so much--not no more--it's yew foolin' me--gittin' me t' love ye--lyin' yew loved me--jest t' git a son t' steal!

ABBIE--(*distractedly*) He won't steal! I'd kill him fust! I do love ye! I'll prove t' ye . . . !

EBEN--(*harshly*) T'ain't no use lyin' no more. I'm deaf t' ye! (*He turns away.*) I hain't seein' ye agen. Good-by!

ABBIE--(*pale with anguish*) Hain't ye even goin' t' kiss me--not once--arter all we loved?

EBEN--(*in a hard voice*) I hain't wantin' t' kiss ye never agen! I'm wantin' t' forgit I ever sot eyes on ye!

ABBIE--Eben!--ye mustn't--wait a spell--I want t' tell ye . . .

EBEN--I'm a-goin' in t' git drunk. I'm a-goin' t' dance.

ABBIE--(*clinging to his arm--with passionate earnestness*) If I could make it--'s if he'd never come up between us--if I could prove t' ye I wa'n't schemin' t' steal from ye--so's everythin' could be jest the same with us, lovin' each other jest the same, kissin' an' happy the same's we've been happy afore he come--if I could do it--ye'd love me agen, wouldn't ye? Ye'd kiss me agen? Ye wouldn't never leave me, would ye?

EBEN--(*moved*) I calc'late not. (*then shaking her hand off his arm--with a bitter smile*) But ye hain't God, be ye?

ABBIE--(*exultantly*) Remember ye've promised! (*then with strange intensity*) Mebbe I kin take back one thin' God does!

EBEN--(*peering at her*) Ye're gittin' cracked, hain't ye? (*then going towards door*) I'm a-goin' t' dance.

ABBIE--(*calls after him intensely*) I'll prove t' ye! I'll prove I love ye better'n. . . . (*He goes in the door, not seeming to hear. She remains standing where she is, looking after him--then she finishes desperately*) Better'n everythin' else in the world!

SCENE THREE

Just before dawn in the morning--shows the kitchen and Cabot's bedroom. In the kitchen, by the light of a tallow candle on the table, Eben is sitting, his chin propped on his hands, his drawn face blank and expressionless. His carpetbag is on the floor beside him. In the bedroom, dimly lighted by a small whale-oil lamp, Cabot lies asleep. Abbie is bending over the cradle, listening, her face full of

error yet with an undercurrent of desperate triumph. Suddenly, she breaks down and sobs, appears about to throw herself on her knees beside the cradle; but the old man turns restlessly, groaning in his sleep, and she controls herself, and, shrinking away from the cradle with a gesture of horror, backs swiftly toward the door in rear and goes out. A moment later she comes into the kitchen and, running to Eben, flings her arms about his neck and kisses him wildly. He hardens himself, he remains unmoved and cold, he keeps his eyes straight ahead.

ABBIE--(*hysterically*) I done it, Eben! I told ye I'd do it! I've proved I love ye--better'n everythin'--so's ye can't never doubt me no more!

EBEN--(*dully*) Whatever ye done, it hain't no good now.

ABBIE--(*wildly*) Don't ye say that! Kiss me, Eben, won't ye? I need ye t' kiss me arter what I done! I need ye t' say ye love me!

EBEN--(*kisses her without emotion--dully*) That's fur good-by. I'm a-goin' soon.

ABBIE--No! No! Ye won't go--not now!

EBEN--(*going on with his own thoughts*) I been a-thinkin'--an' I hain't goin' t' tell Paw nothin'. I'll leave Maw t' take vengeance on ye. If I told him, the old skunk'd jest be stinkin' mean enuf to take it out on that baby. (*his voice showing emotion in spite of him*) An' I don't want nothin' bad t' happen t' him. He hain't t' blame fur yew. (*He adds with a certain queer pride*) An' he looks like me! An' by God, he's mine! An' some day I'll be a-comin' back an' . . . !

ABBIE--(*too absorbed in her own thoughts to listen to him--pleadingly*) They's no cause fur ye t' go now--they's no sense--it's all the same's it was--they's nothin' come b'tween us now--arter what done!

EBEN--(*Something in her voice arouses him. He stares at her a bit frightenedly.*) Ye look mad, Abbie. What did ye do?

ABBIE--I--I killed him, Eben.

EBEN--(*amazed*) Ye killed him?

ABBIE--(*dully*) Ay-eh.

EBEN--(*recovering from his astonishment--savagely*) An' serve him right! But we got t' do somethin' quick t' make it look s'if the old skunk'd killed himself when he was drunk. We kin prove by 'em all how drunk he got.

ABBIE--(*wildly*) No! No! Not him! (*laughing distractedly*) But that's what I ought t' done, hain't it? I oughter killed him instead. Why didn't ye tell me?

EBEN--(*appalled*) Instead? What d'ye mean?

ABBIE--Not him.

EBEN--(*his face grown ghastly*) Not--not that baby!

ABBIE--(*dully*) Ay-eh!

EBEN--(*falls to his knees as if he'd been struck--his voice trembling with horror*) Oh, God A'mighty! A'mighty God! Maw, whar was ye why didn't ye stop her?

ABBIE--(*simply*) She went back t' her grave that night we fust done it, remember? I hain't felt her about since. (*A pause. Eben hides his*

head in his hands, trembling all over as if he had the ague. She goes on dully) I left the piller over his little face. Then he killed himself. He stopped breathin'. (She begins to weep softly.)

EBEN--(*rage beginning to mingle with grief*) He looked like me. He was mine, damn ye!

ABBIE--(*slowly and brokenly*) I didn't want t' do it. I hated myself fur doin' it. I loved him. He was so purty--dead spit 'n' image o' yew. But I loved yew more--an' yew was goin' away--far off whar I'd never see ye agen, never kiss ye, never feel ye pressed agin me agen--an' ye said ye hated me fur havin' him--ye said ye hated him an' wished he was dead--ye said if it hadn't been fur him comin' it'd be the same's afore between us.

EBEN--(*unable to endure this, springs to his feet in a fury, threatening her, his twitching fingers seeming to reach out for her throat*) Ye lie! I never said--I never dreamed ye'd--I'd cut off my head afore I'd hurt his finger!

ABBIE--(*piteously, sinking on her knees*) Eben, don't ye look at me like that--hatin' me--not after what I done fur ye--fur us--so's we could be happy agen--

EBEN--(*furiously now*) Shut up, or I'll kill ye! I see yer game now--the same old sneakin' trick--ye're aimin' t' blame me fur the murder ye done!

ABBIE--(*moaning--putting her hands over her ears*) Don't ye, Eben! Don't ye! (She grasps his legs.)

EBEN--(*his mood suddenly changing to horror, shrinks away from her*) Don't ye tech me! Ye're pizen! How could ye--t' murder a pore little critter--Ye must've swapped yer soul t' hell! (*suddenly raging*)

Ha! I kin see why ye done it! Not the lies ye jest told--but 'cause ye wanted t' steal agen--steal the last thin' ye'd left me--my part o' him--no, the hull o' him--ye saw he looked like me--ye knowed he was all mine--an' ye couldn't b'ar it--I know ye! Ye killed him fur bein' mine! *(All this has driven him almost insane. He makes a rush past her for the door--then turns--shaking both fists at her violently)* But I'll take vengeance now! I'll git the Sheriff! I'll tell him everythin'! Then I'll sing "I'm off to Californi-a!" an' go--gold--Golden Gate--gold sun--fields o' gold in the West! *(This last he half shouts, half croons incoherently, suddenly breaking off passionately.)* I'm a-goin' fur the Sheriff t' come an' git ye! I want ye tuk away, locked up from me! I can't stand t' luk at ye! Murderer an' thief 'r not, ye still tempt me! I'll give ye up t' the Sheriff! *(He turns and runs out, around the corner of house, panting and sobbing, and breaks into a swerving sprint down the road.)*

ABBIE--*(struggling to her feet, runs to the door, calling after him)* I love ye, Eben! I love ye! *(She stops at the door weakly, swaying, about to fall.)* I don't care what ye do--if ye'll on'y love me agen! *(She falls limply to the floor in a faint.)*

SCENE FOUR

About an hour later. Same as Scene Three. Shows the kitchen and Cabot's bedroom. It is after dawn. The sky is brilliant with the sunrise. In the kitchen, Abbie sits at the table, her body limp and exhausted, her head bowed down over her arms, her face hidden. Upstairs, Cabot is still asleep but awakens with a start. He looks toward the window and gives a snort of surprise and irritation--throws back the covers and begins hurriedly pulling on his clothes.

Without looking behind him, he begins talking to Abbie, whom he supposes beside him.

CABOT--Thunder 'n' lightnin', Abbie! I hain't slept this late in fifty year! Looks 's if the sun was full riz a'most. Must've been the dancin' an' likker. Must be gittin' old. I hope Eben's t' wuk. Ye might've tuk the trouble t' rouse me, Abbie. (*He turns--sees no one there--surprised*) Waal--whar air she? Gittin' vittles, I calc'late. (*He tiptoes to the cradle and peers down--proudly*) Mornin', sonny. Putty's a picter! Sleepin' sound. He don't beller all night like most o' 'em. (*He goes quietly out the door in rear--a few moments later enters kitchen--sees Abbie--with satisfaction*) So thar ye be. Ye got any vittles cooked?

ABBIE--(*without moving*) No.

CABOT--(*coming to her, almost sympathetically*) Ye feelin' sick?

ABBIE--No.

CABOT--(*pats her on shoulder. She shudders.*) Ye'd best lie down a spell. (*half jocularly*) Yer son'll be needin' ye soon. He'd ought t' wake up with a gnashin' appetite, the sound way he's sleepin'.

ABBIE--(*shudders--then in a dead voice*) He hain't never goin' t' wake up.

CABOT--(*jokingly*) Takes after me this mornin'. I hain't slept so late in. . . .

ABBIE--He's dead.

CABOT--(*stares at her--bewilderedly*) What. . . .

ABBIE--I killed him.

CABOT--(*stepping back from her--aghast*) Air ye drunk--'r crazy--'r . . . !

ABBIE--(*suddenly lifts her head and turns on him--wildly*) I killed him, I tell ye! I smothered him. Go up an' see if ye don't b'lieve me! (*Cabot stares at her a second, then bolts out the rear door, can be heard bounding up the stairs, and rushes into the bedroom and over to the cradle. Abbie has sunk back lifelessly into her former position. Cabot puts his hand down on the body in the crib. An expression of fear and horror comes over his face.*)

CABOT--(*shrinking away--tremblingly*) God A'mighty! God A'mighty. (*He stumbles out the door--in a short while returns to the kitchen--comes to Abbie, the stunned expression still on his face--hoarsely*) Why did ye do it? Why? (*As she doesn't answer, he grabs her violently by the shoulder and shakes her.*) I ax ye why ye done it! Ye'd better tell me 'r . . . !

ABBIE--(*gives him a furious push which sends him staggering back and springs to her feet--with wild rage and hatred*) Don't ye dare tech me! What right hev ye t' question me 'bout him? He wa'n't yewr son! Think I'd have a son by yew? I'd die fust! I hate the sight o' ye an' allus did! It's yew I should've murdered, if I'd had good sense! I hate ye! I love Eben. I did from the fust. An' he was Eben's son--mine an' Eben's--not your'n!

CABOT--(*stands looking at her dazedly--a pause--finding his words with an effort--dully*) That was it--what I felt--pokin' 'round the corners--while ye lied--holdin' yerself from me--sayin' ye'd a'ready conceived--(*He lapses into crushed silence--then with a strange emotion*) He's dead, sart'n. I felt his heart. Pore little critter! (*He blinks back one tear, wiping his sleeve across his nose.*)

ABBIE--(*hysterically*) Don't ye! Don't ye! (*She sobs unrestrainedly.*)

CABOT--(*with a concentrated effort that stiffens his body into a rigid line and hardens his face into a stony mask--through his teeth to himself*) I got t' be--like a stone--a rock o' jedgment! (*A pause. He gets complete control over himself--harshly*) If he was Eben's, I be glad he air gone! An' mebbe I suspicioned it all along. I felt they was somethin' onnateral--somewhars--the house got so lonesome--an' cold--drivin' me down t' the barn--t' the beasts o' the field. . . . Ay-eh. I must've suspicioned--somethin'. Ye didn't fool me--not altogether, leastways--I'm too old a bird--growin' ripe on the bough. . . . (*He becomes aware he is wandering, straightens again, looks at Abbie with a cruel grin.*) So ye'd liked t' hev murdered me 'stead o' him, would ye? Waal, I'll live to a hundred! I'll live t' see ye hung! I'll deliver ye up t' the jedgment o' God an' the law! I'll git the Sheriff now. (*starts for the door*)

ABBIE--(*dully*) Ye needn't. Eben's gone fur him.

CABOT--(*amazed*) Eben--gone fur the Sheriff?

ABBIE--Ay-eh.

CABOT--T' inform agen ye?

ABBIE--Ay-eh.

CABOT--(*considers this--a pause--then in a hard voice*) Waal, I'm thankful fur him savin' me the trouble. I'll git t' wuk. (*He goes to the door--then turns--in a voice full of strange emotion*) He'd ought t' been my son, Abbie. Ye'd ought t' loved me. I'm a man. If ye'd loved me, I'd never told no Sheriff on ye no matter what ye did, if they was t' brile me alive!

ABBIE--(*defensively*) They's more to it nor yew know, makes him tell.

CABOT--(*dryly*) Fur yewr sake, I hope they be. (*He goes out--comes around to the gate--stares up at the sky. His control relaxes. For a moment he is old and weary. He murmurs despairingly*) God A'mighty, I be lonesomer'n ever! (*He hears running footsteps from the left, immediately is himself again. Eben runs in, panting exhaustedly, wild-eyed and mad looking. He lurches through the gate. Cabot grabs him by the shoulder. Eben stares at him dumbly.* Did ye tell the Sheriff?

EBEN--(*nodding stupidly*) Ay-eh.

CABOT--(*gives him a push away that sends him sprawling--laughing with withering contempt*) Good fur ye! A prime chip o' ye Maw ye be! (*He goes toward the barn, laughing harshly. Eben scrambles to his feet. Suddenly Cabot turns--grimly threatening*) Git off this farm when the Sheriff takes her--or, by God, he'll have to come back an' git me fur murder, too! (*He stalks off. Eben does not appear to have heard him. He runs to the door and comes into the kitchen. Abbie looks up with a cry of anguished joy. Eben stumbles over and throws himself on his knees beside her--sobbing brokenly*)

EBEN--Fergive me!

ABBIE--(*happily*) Eben! (*She kisses him and pulls his head over against her breast.*)

EBEN--I love ye! Fergive me!

ABBIE--(*ecstatically*) I'd fergive ye all the sins in hell fur sayin' that! (*She kisses his head, pressing it to her with a fierce passion of possession.*)

EBEN--(*brokenly*) But I told the Sheriff. He's comin' fur ye!

ABBIE--I kin b'ar what happens t' me--now!

EBEN--I woke him up. I told him. He says, wait till I git dressed. I was waiting. I got to thinkin' o' yew. I got to thinkin' how I'd loved ye. It hurt like somethin' was bustin' in my chest an' head. I got t' cryin'. I knowed sudden I loved ye yet, an' allus would love ye!

ABBIE--(*caressing his hair--tenderly*) My boy, hain't ye?

EBEN--I begun t' run back. I cut across the fields an' through the woods. I thought ye might have time t' run away--with me--an'. . .

ABBIE--(*shaking her head*) I got t' take my punishment--t' pay fur my sin.

EBEN--Then I want t' share it with ye.

ABBIE--Ye didn't do nothin'.

EBEN--I put it in yer head. I wisht he was dead! I as much as urged ye t' do it!

ABBIE--No. It was me alone!

EBEN--I'm as guilty as yew be! He was the child o' our sin.

ABBIE--(*lifting her head as if defying God*) I don't repent that sin! I hain't askin' God t' fergive that!

EBEN--Nor me--but it led up t' the other--an' the murder ye did, ye did 'count o' me--an' it's my murder, too, I'll tell the Sheriff--an' if ye deny it, I'll say we planned it t'gether--an' they'll all b'lieve me, fur they suspicion everythin' we've done, an' it'll seem likely an' true to em. An' it is true--way down. I did help ye--somehow.

ABBIE--(*laying her head on his--sobbing*) No! I don't want yew t suffer!

EBEN--I got t' pay fur my part o' the sin! An' I'd suffer wuss leavin' ye, goin' West, thinkin' o' ye day an' night, bein' out when yew was in--(*lowering his voice*) 'R bein' alive when yew was dead. (*a pause*) I want t' share with ye, Abbie--prison 'r death 'r hell 'r anythin'! (*He looks into her eyes and forces a trembling smile.*) If I'm sharin' with ye, I won't feel lonesome, leastways.

ABBIE--(*weakly*) Eben! I won't let ye! I can't let ye!

EBEN--(*kissing her--tenderly*) Ye can't he'p yerself. I got ye beat fur once!

ABBIE--(*forcing a smile--adoringly*) I hain't beat--s'long's I got ye!

EBEN--(*hears the sound of feet outside*) Sssh! Listen! They've come t' take us!

ABBIE--No, it's him. Don't give him no chance to fight ye, Eben. Don't say nothin'--no matter what he says. An' I won't, neither. (*It is Cabot. He comes up from the barn in a great state of excitement and strides into the house and then into the kitchen. Eben is kneeling beside Abbie, his arm around her, hers around him. They stare straight ahead.*)

CABOT--(*stares at them, his face hard. A long pause--vindictively*) Ye make a slick pair o' murderin' turtle doves! Ye'd ought t' be both hung on the same limb an' left thar t' swing in the breeze an' rot--a warnin' t' old fools like me t' b'ar their lonesomeness alone--an' fur young fools like ye t' hobble their lust. (*A pause. The excitement returns to his face, his eyes snap, he looks a bit crazy.*) I couldn't work today. I couldn't take no interest. T' hell with the farm. I'm

leavin' it! I've turned the cows an' other stock loose. I've druv 'em into the woods whar they kin be free! By freein' 'em, I'm freein' myself! I'm quittin' here today! I'll set fire t' house an' barn an' watch 'em burn, an' I'll leave yer Maw t' haunt the ashes, an' I'll will the fields back t' God, so that nothin' human kin never touch 'em! I'll be a-goin' to Californi-a--t' jine Simeon an' Peter--true sons o' mine if they be dumb fools--an' the Cabots'll find Solomon's Mines t'gether! (*He suddenly cuts a mad caper.*) Whoop! What was the song they sung? "Oh, Californi-a! That's the land fur me." (*He sings this--then gets on his knees by the floorboard under which the money was hid.*) An' I'll sail thar on one o' the finest clippers I kin find! I've got the money! Pity ye didn't know whar this was hidden so's ye could steal. . . . (*He has pulled up the board. He stares--feels--stares again. A pause of dead silence. He slowly turns, slumping into a sitting position on the floor, his eyes like those of a dead fish, his face the sickly green of an attack of nausea. He swallows painfully several times--forces a weak smile at last.*) So--ye did steal it!

EBEN--(*emotionlessly*) I swapped it t' Sim an' Peter fur their share o' the farm--t' pay their passage t' Californi-a.

CABOT--(*with one sardonic*) Ha! (*He begins to recover. Gets slowly to his feet--strangely*) I calc'late God give it to 'em--not yew! God's hard, not easy! Mebbe they's easy gold in the West, but it hain't God's gold. It hain't fur me. I kin hear His voice warnin' me agen t' be hard an' stay on my farm. I kin see his hand usin' Eben t' steal t' keep me from weakness. I kin feel I be in the palm o' His hand, His fingers guidin' me. (*A pause--then he mutters sadly*) It's a-goin' t' be lonesomer now than ever it war afore--an' I'm gittin' old, Lord--ripe on the bough. . . . (*then stiffening*) Waal--what d'ye

want? God's lonesome, hain't He? God's hard an' lonesome! (*A pause. The sheriff with two men comes up the road from the left. They move cautiously to the door. The sheriff knocks on it with the butt of his pistol.*)

SHERIFF--Open in the name o' the law! (*They start.*)

CABOT--They've come fur ye. (*He goes to the rear door.*) Come in, Jim! (*The three men enter. Cabot meets them in doorway.*) Jest a minit, Jim. I got 'em safe here. (*The sheriff nods. He and his companions remain in the doorway.*)

EBEN--(*suddenly calls*) I lied this mornin', Jim. I helped her do it. Ye kin take me, too.

ABBIE--(*brokenly*) No!

CABOT--Take 'em both. (*He comes forward--stares at Eben with a trace of grudging admiration.*) Putty good--fur yew! Waal, I got t' round up the stock. Good-by.

EBEN--Good-by.

ABBIE--Good-by. (*Cabot turns and strides past the men--comes out and around the corner of the house, his shoulders squared, his face stony, and stalks grimly toward the barn. In the meantime the sheriff and men have come into the room.*)

SHERIFF--(*embarrassedly*) Waal--we'd best start.

ABBIE--Wait, (*turns to Eben*) I love ye, Eben.

EBEN--I love ye, Abbie. (*They kiss. The three men grin and shuffle embarrassedly. Eben takes Abbie's hand. They go out the door in rear, the men following, and come from the house, walking hand in*

hand to the gate. Eben stops there and points to the sunrise sky.)
Sun's a-rizin'. Purty, hain't it?

ABBIE--Ay-eh. (*They both stand for a moment looking up raptly in attitudes strangely aloof and devout.*)

SHERIFF--(*looking around at the farm enviously--to his companion*) It's a jim-dandy farm, no denyin'. Wished I owned it!

(The Curtain Falls)

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Desire Under The Elms

Desire Under the Elms is a 1924 play written by Eugene O'Neill. Like Mourning Becomes Electra, Desire Under the Elms signifies an attempt by O'Neill to adapt plot elements and themes of Greek tragedy to a rural New England setting. It was inspired by the myth of Phaedra, Hippolytus, and Theseus.

A film version was produced in 1958, and there is an operatic setting by Edward Thomas.

The following descriptions are taken from the text of the play.

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